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# Prejudice as Group Position: Microfoundations of a Sociological Approach to Racism and Race Relations

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*This research integrates and elaborates the basic premises of Blumer's group position theory of prejudice. It does so in order to make explicit, more fully integrated, and empirically pliable the theoretical foundations of a sociological analysis of the nature of racial prejudice. In so doing, the research identifies important areas of agreement between Gordon Allport's approach to prejudice and that of Blumer. Blumer neither provided a full synthetic statement of his several major pieces on prejudice nor pursued sustained empirical research in the area. Hence, the present article (1) identifies the core assumptions of the group position model, (2) summarizes a recent line of empirical work examining claims embedded in the group position approach, (3) specifies how this approach differs from other closely related approaches, and (4) identifies major tasks for future theoretical and empirical work.*

> *The practice of racism is not an abstraction; it produces patterns of behavior which involve real people in highly stressful conflicts of interests and expectation.*
>
> —Lincoln, 1996 (pp. 8–9)

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The need for penetrating theoretical models of prejudice is no less acute today than it was when Gordon Allport published his seminal work, *The Nature of Prejudice*, in 1954. In the United States, and countless other parts of the world, significant cleavages develop between groups defined by racial or ethnic markers. Within the United States, we currently face a potentially historic turn against many of the civil rights accomplishments of the past four decades: a great chasm of misunderstanding still separates Black and White Americans, and a rising tide of anti-immigrant fervor is gathering force. There are, in short, many reasons for social psychologists to remain committed to unraveling the nature of prejudice. As social scientists posing basic questions of social dynamics with respect to race there is much that we do not yet understand.

Over the past two decades we have seen efforts to refine and extend Adorno and colleagues' authoritarian personality theory (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1988; Duckitt, 1989). Important work has reconceptualized the classic D. Katz and Braly (1933) approach to measuring and understanding racial stereotypes (Devine & Elliot, 1995). A wide array of studies have sought to modernize and make politically relevant Allport's sociocultural model of prejudice (see I. Katz, 1991; Pettigrew, 1982) in the form of theories of modern or symbolic racism (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears, 1988) or a distinction between blatant and subtle racism (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Myrdal's (1944) concern with value contradictions figures prominently in a more recent line of work on ambivalence (Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986). And above all else, there has been a wide-ranging effort to grapple with social identity processes as a fundamental aspect of intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1981, 1982; J. C. Turner, 1987).

Most of this work has emerged from one of the "three faces" of social psychology as defined by House: that involving the dominant face, or social psychology as practiced by those trained mainly in psychology (cf. House, 1977). It is fair to say that this approach retains its traditional emphasis on the psychological functioning of the individual in response to immediate social stimuli though this framework is of necessity broadened to a degree for those working in political psychology (Sears, 1987). My purpose is to elaborate the foundations of a theory of prejudice more squarely identified with a sociological tradition. Specifically, I extend, refine and report on partial tests of Herbert Blumer's group position theory of prejudice. This is a valuable exercise for two reasons.

First, there is something to be gained from viewing prejudice through a more sociological lens. In this approach, the express mission is to theorize how social structure comes to shape individual psychology and socially consequential behavior. It is neither a sociological approach interested only in the macro-level, structural dynamics of race (Blauner, 1972; Wilson, 1978) nor one that defines individual psychological dynamics as relatively unimportant (Bonacich, 1991). Although grounded in a sociological tradition, the group position approach to prejudice falls squarely within the domain of social psychology as defined by

Dorwin Cartwright: it is concerned with "how society influences the cognition, motivation, development, and behavior of individuals and, in turn, is influenced by them" (Cartwright, 1979, p. 91). Although not in complete agreement, in this respect at least the approaches of Allport and of Blumer share an important commonality (a point elaborated upon below).

Second, the group position framework may provide a viable synthesis of models of racial prejudice that all too often have been treated as antagonistic, if not mutually exclusive, in much of the previous research literature. I hope to show that it can save us from the all too often false oppositions of interests versus ideology, of rationality versus irrationality, of microsocial versus macrosocial approaches.

Although ironic on the surface, it is quite appropriate on close inspection to develop group position theory in an issue honoring Gordon Allport. Allport repeatedly emphasized the need for complex models and a multilayered understanding of prejudice. In his classic schematic depiction of the "Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study of the Causes of Prejudice," Allport (1954) outlined six levels of analysis ranging from the most distal to the most proximate to the individual: historical, sociocultural, situational, personality dynamics, phenomenological (psychological), and stimulus object. Thus, the historical, cultural, situational and phenomenological emphases of Blumer's approach, despite his occasional protestations to the contrary, actually fit well under a larger Allportian lens. And despite seeking to fashion a distinctively sociological understanding of race relations (Blumer, 1955) and of prejudice (Blumer, 1958a), Blumer remained tied to concepts of attitude, affect, stereotype, group identity, and a concern with patterns of intergroup contact, all indispensable ingredients of Allport's work as well.

First, I review and explicate Blumer's theory of prejudice as group position. This requires a brief comparison of his model to what, for lack of a better label, I call the classical sociocultural model of prejudice, which emphasizes the social learning of negative feelings and beliefs about outgroup members and the centrally affective and nonrational, if not irrational, view of racial prejudice it embraces (Schuman & Harding, 1964). Second, I summarize several aspects of my own program of research seeking to apply and test empirically the group position model. This effort has been more piecemeal than would be ideal, but enough work has been done to warrant serious consideration. Third, I attempt to specify how this approach adds to other closely related theoretical models, such as paternalism theory (Jackman, 1994) and social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Fourth, I sketch a series of questions that must be addressed, such as how the approach may related to social identity theory, if theory and research in the area are to advance.

A central claim of the group position approach is that prejudice involves more than negative stereotypes and negative feelings, that it involves most centrally a commitment to a relative status positioning of groups in a racialized social order. Instead of placing analytical primacy on affect and stereotyping, or individual

feelings and resentments, Blumer's analysis places perceptions of competition and threat in a racially stratified social setting at the core of racial prejudice.[1]

## The Group Position Model

There is an intrinsically collective or group-based dimension to racial prejudice generally, and to modern issues of racial politics in specific. In a five-page essay published in 1958 that has since become a sociological classic, Herbert Blumer (1958a) criticized theories of prejudice that focused narrowly on individual feelings of like and dislike and perceptions of group differences. He proposed that "prejudice" fundamentally inhered in a "sense of group position," with this sense of group position having indissoluble collective properties to it. Prejudice required the recognition and use of racial categories. Individuals had to place themselves and others into different categories. This differentiation of categories, perforce, established a relationship between members of the categories. Ideas and feelings about racial groups of necessity have implications for appropriate relations between members of those groups. One could not have an idea or orientation to Blacks in the United States, for example, without immediately invoking, at least implicitly, the comparison or connection with White Americans. As Blumer put it, "fundamentally racial feelings point to and depend on a positional arrangement of racial groups" (Blumer, 1958a, p. 4). The focus of theory and research should therefore be the collective process of defining racial groups and their statuses.

The group position model of racial prejudice can effectively blend core ideas from orthodox prejudice models with a sociological understanding of group relations. The former directs attention to the social learning of negative feelings and beliefs about racial groups and their members. The latter directs attention to the historical development of group relations and to the collective or group interests that naturally flow from the institutionalization of a racially or ethnically stratified social order. In a manner quite consistent with Allport's call for multilayered analysis, group position theory weds these perspectives by directing attention to a historically emergent and variable set of racialized identities, modes of social organization, group interests, and status expectations.

To be sure, Blumer's objective was to shift analytical attention away from processes internal to the individual while still recognizing that individual racial prejudice was a powerful social force. In this respect, Blumer's argument stands in contradistinction both to the symbolic racism approach (Sears, 1988; Kinder & Sanders, 1996) and to more conventional sociological models of ethnic

[1] Much of the empirical work drawn on to support the group position theory is based on analyses of large-scale sample survey data. On several counts, such an approach would have troubled Blumer (see Blumer, 1969). For a fuller discussion of these epistemological issues see Bobo and Tuan (1996).

antagonism, such as the early work of Edna Bonacich (1972, 1973). The former attempt to develop, at least at the outset, a largely psychological and ideational account of racial politics (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979). The latter typically seeks to reduce racial conflict to purely objective economic and class-based struggles (Bonacich, 1991). Both models, I believe, develop distorted analyses of racial conflict. To see why this is so I elaborate and extend Blumer's model of group position.

Blumer maintained that racial prejudice was best understood as a general attitude or orientation involving normative ideas about where one's own group should stand in the social order vis-à-vis an outgroup. His main focus of attention was on prejudice among dominant groups' members. It is worth noting that the main concepts and dynamics identified by Blumer may be applied to how members of a subordinate group come to view members of a dominant group. Furthermore, I argue these ideas may also be usefully applied to relations among and between racial minority groups in a multiethnic social setting.

For Blumer, dominant group outlooks exhibit four features. The first feature is a feeling of superiority on the part of dominant group members. The second feature is a belief that the subordinate group is intrinsically different and alien. The third feature involves a sense of proprietary claim over certain rights, statuses, and resources. The fourth feature involves a perception of threat from members of a subordinate group who harbor a desire for a greater share of dominant group members' prerogatives.

Blumer's discussion of feelings of superiority and beliefs that a subordinate group is "alien and different" are familiar notions. These notions can be restated as the orthodox prejudice models' concern with intergroup affect or feelings and with negative stereotyping. The bedrock assumption of the group position model is that dominant group members must make an affectively important distinction between themselves and subordinate group members. This affective distinction is linked to ideas about the traits, capabilities and likely behaviors of subordinate group members.

Yet such group identities and stereotyping fall well short of making prejudice a dynamic social and historical force, according to Blumer. As he explained, "The combination of these two feelings of superiority and of distinctiveness can easily give rise to feelings of aversion and even antipathy. But in themselves they do not form prejudice" (Blumer, 1958a, p. 4). The dynamic factors in prejudice begin with the feeling of proprietary claim or first rights to scarce and socially valued goods and resources. A wide range of claims might be recognized in the sense of group position. Blumer notes such relatively tangible claims such as access to or control of land, property, jobs and businesses, political decision making, educational institutions, and recreational resources. But he also includes claims on such relatively intangible things as positions of prestige and access to "areas of intimacy and privacy" (Blumer, 1958a, p. 4). Thus the sense of group position is a very general

orientation or broad-spectrum understanding on where the dominant group should stand relative to the subordinate group.

These feelings of proprietary claim or ideas about the rights, resources, and statuses dominant group members are duly entitled to enjoy come to have social effect when members of the dominant group are confronted with feelings of perceived threat. The sense of group position is most readily revealed and becomes consequential insofar as dominant group members believe that subordinate group members are encroaching on their rightful prerogatives. It is the conjunction of presumed prior access or claim and perception of threat to such claims that arouses the belief that a subordinate group is "getting out of place":

> The dominant racial group construes the crossing of the line or preparations to cross the line as threats to its status, its power, and its livelihood.
> It thus develops fears, apprehensions, resentments, angers, and bitternesses which become fused into a general feeling of prejudice against the subordinate racial people or peoples. (Blumer, 1955, p. 13)

Herein lies the intrinsically positional nature of racial prejudice. "The source of race prejudice," Blumer argued, "lies in a felt challenge to this sense of group position" (1958a, p. 5).

Several efforts to draw on the group position model exist in the research literature and merit consideration here. On the whole, these efforts face one of two limitations. First, previous research has been restricted to indirect tests of the core mechanisms of racial prejudice identified by Blumer (Wellman, 1977; Smith, 1981; Bobo, 1983). Second, those studies not relying on indirect tests have typically been secondary analyses with less than ideal measures of core concepts and mistakenly reduce the theory to a purely structural-level claim of objective threat (Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989; Quillian, 1995).

There are three features of Blumer's ideas that I believe should be more explicitly incorporated into the group position model than prior research has recognized. The first point concerns the nature and effects of racial identities. The second point concerns the role of affect and emotions in the sense of group position. The third point concerns the pivotal role of interests and interest groups in race relations.

### *Race as a Fundamental Cleavage*

My reading of Blumer's work indicates that he clearly held that *racial identities are quasi-autonomous social forces, ranking with economic and other institutional dynamics in shaping human social organization.* He makes this point most directly in his essay "Industrialization and Race Relations," published in 1965. After reviewing the core features of the process of industrialization and the presumed social effects thereof, Blumer debunks one of the principal claims about the impact of industrialization made by mainstream economists and sociologists (see also Omi &

Winant, 1986; Stone, 1985): namely, that economic forces would inevitably erode the parochial and anachronistic effects of racial ties in ordering social life. For Blumer, early modes of social organization would powerfully constrain and condition the presumed rationalizing force of economic modernization. This would be especially likely to occur where patterns of racial identity, belief, and social organization have been institutionalized. Indeed, accommodation to an established racial order might become economically rational under such conditions. As Blumer explained:

> Rational operation of industrial enterprises which are introduced into a racially ordered society may call for a deferential respect for the canons and sensitivities of that racial order. . . . It is a mistake, accordingly, to assume that the rational motif of industrialism signifies an automatic undermining of a racial order into which industrialism enters. To the contrary, the rational imperative in industrial operations may function to maintain and reinforce the established racial order. (Blumer, 1965a, p. 233)

Blumer thus credited race with a powerful capacity to influence, shape, and condition the economic and class dynamics of a society. He did so, it must be emphasized, without denying the importance of technological, economic, and other historical dynamics (Blumer, 1955). Instead, he avoided the conventional sociological error of reducing race to merely its economic manifestations. In short, racial attachments and racialized modes of social organization have social underpinnings that reach beyond the economic.[2]

Blumer expected that features of the existing racial order would be built into or refashion themselves under new or transforming economic institutions. Minorities would be excluded from important positions, locked into lower level positions, or afforded only highly constrained mobility opportunities in a modern economic order. In part, he expected that those occupying key hiring and managerial ranks would act on the basis of their preexisting orientations or, at least, in response to pressure from workers and customers. The likelihood of doing so would be greatly reinforced by other features of an institutionalized racial order, such as racially segregated communities, racially segregated friendship networks and spheres of informal interaction, and racially homogeneous family units.

At a minimum, from Blumer's perspective, economic transformation alone could not undermine a racial order that had many other social bases and manifestations. Only theories that reduced racial identities to an economic base could advance such a prediction. Rather, a near opposite pattern should obtain where the

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[2] Although seldom stated so directly, it is exactly the quasi-autonomous and permeative effects of social conceptions of race that figured in many early critiques of William Julius Wilson's (1978) "declining significance of race" thesis (see Pettigrew, 1980, 1981; Willie, 1978). Many counterproductive features and limitations of the decade-long "race versus class" debate might have been avoided if sociological analysts of race issues attended to both the social psychological, microsocial aspects of racial phenomena as well as to the social structural, macrosocial aspects.

racial order ultimately asserts itself within the economic sphere. As Blumer argued:

> The intrinsic structural requirements of industrialism need not, contrary to much a priori theorising, force a rearrangement of the relations set by the racial system. We have here, indeed, somewhat of a paradoxical situation in that while industrialization may alter greatly the social order, it may leave the racial system that is embedded in that order essentially intact. (1965a, p. 234)

Since racial attachments are not reducible to economic or material bases, there is neither a logical reason nor a historical basis for expecting otherwise profound economic transformations to erode a racial order.

It is important to stress, however, that none of this amounts to adopting a primordial or essentialist view of racial identities. Blumer was explicit about the socially constructed nature of racial identities. He was equally explicit about the potential for change in a racial order. He argued that change in a racial order would spring from a direct assault on that racial order from largely noneconomic and political forces. "The evidence seems to me," Blumer wrote, "to lead overwhelmingly to the conclusion that such changes do not arise from inner considerations of industrial efficiency. Instead they arise from outside pressure, chiefly political pressures" (1965a, p. 247).

Such a political challenge to the racial order, to a widespread and deeply rooted collective sense of group position, is most likely to take shape "when the process of running definition does not keep abreast of major shifts in the social order" (Blumer, 1958a, p. 7). The breakdown of "running definition" appears to occur when social change that enhances the power resources under direct control of minority groups, or important allies of minority groups, increases without encountering effective dispute and challenge from dominant group members. A lack of effective ongoing protection of a privileged group position may have several sources. One possibility that Blumer recognized was the presence of an opaque, or at least not immediately apparent, connection between significant social trends and the long-term power balance between groups. One example of such a process is the historic demographic shifts of the Black population from South to non-South states and from rural to urban areas that resulted in greater financial resources, political influence, and leadership strength within Black communities (McAdam, 1982; Morris, 1984). A subordinate group's capacity to challenge the dominant group might greatly improve for reasons and in ways not immediately apprehended as a threat to the existing racial order. Likewise, a shift in the interests and needs of major external parties to a set of social relations may work in favor of a subordinated racial group. A case in point is the gradual but decisive change in the federal government's stake in the Jim Crow institutions of the American South in response to Cold War ideological struggles against communism (Franklin & Moss, 1988; Sitkoff, 1981), or the development of biracial unionism in the face of effective use of Blacks as strikebreakers (Wilson, 1978). I will provide just this sort of group

position analysis of major changes in Whites' attitudes toward Blacks in the United States below.

*Affect in the Sense of Group Position*

Blumer recognized that *racial attachments and the sense of group position have core nonrational or socioemotional elements*. Blumer's theory of group position is sometimes discussed as though he had advanced a purely instrumental argument about the nature of racial prejudice (Almaguer, 1994; Giles & Evans, 1986; Quillian, 1995; Taylor, 1995). The historical origins and tenacity of racial attachments cannot be accounted for in terms of purely rational, material, and structural forces. There is, first and foremost, nothing given or rational about attachment to a particular set of socially constructed racial identities. It would be both incorrect and arguably dangerous to regard such social categories as "Indian or Native American" or "Black" or "White" as intrinsically meaningful. Nature did not create such distinctions and it did not endow them with social significance. Nor did an institutional economic form such as slavery, de novo, create sensitivity to color and cultural differences or to the Black-White divide in the United States (Jordan, 1968), though the slave era profoundly affected it (Fredrickson, 1971; Takaki, 1979). There is a more complex human social and interpretative process at work, a process that involves both individual psychological factors and broader sociohistorical factors. The interplay of such forces has long been the foundational concern of sociological social psychology (House, 1981; Kohn, 1989; Turner, 1988).

Blumer did not seriously explore or theorize the emergence of basic racial categories or attachments. He did note that such identities take shape through a historical process, involve perceived differences in physical appearance and culture, may entail origins in separate ecological locations (Blumer, 1955, pp. 7–8), and are decisively influenced by the initial terms and conditions of contact of different groups (cf. Lieberson, 1961). But the categories that come to assume significance, or more importantly, why any specific racial marker comes to powerfully shape human identity and expectations, was not the focus of Blumer's attention. Instead, he focused on how to understand the functioning of the sense of group position once a set of racial relations had been largely institutionalized.

There are at least two other ways in which a purely objective and instrumental reading of Blumer's argument goes astray. The sense of group position, firstly, is a normative construct. As Blumer explained:

> Sociologically it is not a mere reflection of the objective relations between racial groups. Rather it stands for "what ought to be" rather than for "what is." It is a sense of where the two racial groups *belong*. . . . In its own way, the sense of group position is a norm and imperative—indeed a very powerful one. It guides, incites, cows, and coerces. It should be borne in mind that this sense of group position stands for and involves a fundamental kind of group affiliation for the members of the dominant racial group. (Blumer, 1958a, p. 5)

This normative character to the sense of group position immediately separates it from a purely instrumental basis. The normative dimension is also part of why prejudice is an active, adaptive social force. It is infused with a moral imperative.

Secondly, Blumer explicitly argued that the sense of group position functioned along two important axes. One axis involved the more obvious dimension of domination and oppression, of hierarchical ordering and positioning. A second critical axis, however, involved a dimension of exclusion and inclusion, of socioemotional embrace or recoil. The exclusion and inclusion dimension, again, invokes an affective or emotional basis to the sense of group position. Blumer spoke directly, although briefly, to this point in the original essay. He drew attention to aspects of the sense of proprietary claim that included "certain areas of intimacy and privacy" (Blumer, 1958a, p. 4). He also expressly held that "on the social psychological side [the sense of group position] cannot be equated to a sense of social status as ordinarily conceived, for it refers not merely to vertical positioning but to many other lines of position independent of the vertical dimension" (Blumer, 1958a, p. 5). Even Blumer's discussion of perceptions of threat identified an emotional component. He explained the nature of feelings of threat in the following way:

> Race prejudice is a defensive reaction to such challenging of the sense of group position. It consists of the disturbed feelings, usually of marked hostility, that are thereby aroused. As such, race prejudice is a protective device. It functions, however, shortsightedly, to preserve the integrity and the position of the dominant group. (Blumer, 1958a, p. 5)

Blumer thus expressly recognizes a concern with group integrity, not merely positional status. Challenges to this conception of where the dominant group should stand relative to the subordinate group are experienced as *emotionally* involving and upsetting.

Part of the point is that restrictions imposed on a subordinate group reach beyond the conventional status dimensions defined by position within the economic and political order. Blumer made this point most forcefully in his discussion of "The Future of the Color Line" (1965b). In this essay he spoke directly to the exclusion-inclusion dimension of the sense of group position and applied it to an understanding of the substantial but delimited successes of the Black civil rights movement. In large part, his message was that even profound change in some aspects or dimensions of a racial order, and the sense of group position surrounding it, may not erode other core aspects of the sense of group position. Blumer defined the color line in a fashion that identified the American Black- White divide as an important instance of the functioning of the sense of group position. Blumer suggested that the color line

> is a line which separates Whites from Negroes, assigning to each a different position in the social order and attaching to each position a differential set of rights, privileges, and arenas of action. It defines the approach of each racial group to the other, it limits the degree of access to each other, and it outlines respective modes of conduct toward each other. The color line stems from a collective sense held by Whites that Negroes as a racial group do not qualify for equal status, and that because of their racial difference Negroes have no claim to

> being accepted socially. Thus, the color line expresses and sustains the social position of the two groups along two fundamental dimensions—an axis of dominance and subordination, and an axis of inclusion and exclusion. (Blumer, 1965b, p. 322)

The color line, so understood, involved all of the elements Blumer had incorporated into his theory of group position. It involved an abstract idea about groups in relation to one another. This abstract idea was a shared, collective sense of position, not merely individual feelings of like or dislike. The color line also had implications for many different domains of social interaction and experience. In Blumer's analysis, then, "the sense of group position is the central ingredient of the color line" (Blumer, 1965b, p. 323). He suggested that the color line, like the sense of group position, had many layers or levels. The levels of economic status and political status were themselves complex and multilayered. Thus, for example, the elimination of racial exclusion policies in access to employment hardly meant that Blacks would find an easy route to positions of high pay, authority, and prestige. More importantly, the economic and political dimensions of the racial order neither exhausted the forms of restricted life chances facing Black Americans nor exhausted the factors that undergirded racial prejudice as a social force.

Blumer argued that for this reason the civil rights movement had failed to accomplish a fundamental change in the color line. Reaching into the inner layers of the color line, those layers that involve feelings of exclusivity and the most intimate areas of private life, would first require profound success in peeling back the more public layers of the color line. Blumer was doubtful that this would happen. In particular, he saw grounds to expect ongoing racial strife and discord because of the emerging economic, political, and social isolation of many urban Black communities. That is, he expected that the racial sense of group position would continue to assert itself, even if in a more delimited and fluid way (Blumer, 1955). There had been only partial success in changing the color line in the political and economic spheres. Moreover, how the color line affected the private spheres of community, friends, home, and family ties had not been touched at all.

Conceptually, Blumer thus recognized an "inner citadel of the color line" that involved the exclusion-inclusion dimension of the sense of group position. He held that this inner citadel is "a matter of personal attitude and thus falls inside the area of individual determination" (Blumer, 1965b, p. 335). As such, it would prove unusually resistant to external pressure for change. All of which suggests a socioemotional element to the sense of group position that cannot be regarded as rooted in objective, material, and clearly instrumental needs.

### *Interests and Group Position*

Having sketched the socioemotional component of the sense of group position, it must be stressed that Blumer was keenly aware of the instrumental aspects of racial prejudice. Once a *set of racial inequalities has been institutionalized there*

*are meaningful interests that attach to such group positions in a hierarchical and racially stratified social order* (Blauner, 1972; Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Dawson, 1994; Tuch & Hughes, 1996). Thus, to admit of a strong socioemotional dimension to the sense of group position is by no means to mitigate or deny a central place for collective or racial group interests in the dynamics of prejudice. This recognition is a major factor distinguishing group position theory from orthodox prejudice theories. It also accounts for much of the attractiveness of the theory to sociological analysts of race relations (Almaguer, 1994; Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989; Smith, 1981; Wellman, 1977; Wilson, 1973).

On its face, the mere thesis of race prejudice as a sense of group position immediately invokes the imagery of hierarchy, inequality, and oppression. It calls to mind the differing statuses, positions, and interests constituted in a social order divided by race. Indeed, Blumer's emphasis on areas of felt proprietary claim and on perceptions of threat as the central features of racial prejudice, again, raise to a prominent place the stake or interest dominant group members have in a particular racial order. Yet Blumer also spoke directly to the role of interests and of organized interest groups in shaping race relations. In the original essay he identified interests and interest groups as playing a powerful role in the ongoing process of re-creating and defending the sense of group position. Organized segments of racial groups with clear interests may act to influence public discourse and to influence significant political outcomes. To be sure, Blumer regarded the social dialogue that creates and sustains the collective sense of group position as (1) involving abstract collective notions, (2) taking shaping in the sphere of broad public discourse especially around highly salient or "big events" that capture mass attention, and (3) disproportionately shaped by the articulated views of elite social actors. He also saw this discourse about and emergent sense of group position as nonetheless intimately wedded to the actions of interest groups with an instrumental stake in the racial order. Throughout the five articles I take as constituting Blumer's articulation of group position theory there is a consistent thread of concern with interests, at both the individual and collective level, and with power resources.

Blumer called for careful analysis of the configuration of interests and organized power or control resources in studying any situation of racial group relations. Attention to matters of interests and power would serve, Blumer argued, to better identify the sustaining conditions of racial group relations. He was quite blunt about the importance of interests in this regard. "A study of the sustaining conditions in terms of how they function," he wrote, "must necessarily deal with such matters as vested interests, entrenched power, the inertia of institutions, the use of social codes, devices of intimidation, an established opportunity structure, and the responsiveness of office-holders and decision-makers" (1958b, p. 437).

In this respect, the sense of group position involves significant elements of a "realistic group conflict" theory. The theory is expressly concerned with (1) groups who occupy unequal positions in a social order and the interests that attach to those

positions, (2) perceived threats to groups' interests, and (3) resulting meaningful struggles over access to various material and symbolic resources. It is instructive to note that many other students of intergroup attitudes and conflict would concur in this understanding of realistic conflict. For instance, Tajfel argued:

> The conflict for the scarce resources of rank, status, prestige, or winning a contest is "realistic" when it is institutionalized, i.e., when it is explicitly defined as a contest or determined as such by the norms of the situation. (Tajfel, 1982, p. 12)

This is a view shared by Williams (1965) and, to an important degree, Allport (1954) as well. To borrow Allport's own phrase: "All we are saying here is that clashes of interest and values do occur, and that these conflicts are not in themselves instances of prejudice" (1954, p. 229).

The subtle and more significant point, however, is that the melding of group identity, affect, and the interests in most real-world situations of racial stratification make the now conventional dichotomous opposition of "realistic group conflict versus prejudice" empirically nonsensical. From the group position perspective both elements are present. Likewise, Gordon Allport, the premier prejudice theorist, maintained that most instances of intergroup conflict will likely involve both elements. Thus, the current habit of pitting realistic group conflict theory against prejudice as mutually exclusive accounts of modern racial politics is, upon close inspection, distressingly (and distortingly) simplistic (see Bobo, 1988b). As Allport maintained, "Realistic conflict is like a note on an organ. It sets all prejudices that are attuned to it into simultaneous vibration. The listener can scarcely distinguish the pure note from the surrounding jangle" (1954, p. 233). In many concrete group conflict situations, perhaps especially Black-White relations in the United States, there are both affect-laden identities and orientations that are bound up with differential positions and interests.

## Measures and Tests of the Sense of Group Position

For the present I separate work attempting to test the group position framework into four domains. First, I consider efforts to develop reliable and valid measures of competitive threat. There is evidence that we can do so and in a manner that adds information not likely to be tapped by other models. Second, I discuss the most ambitious effort I have undertaken to expand the group position model to consider both the views of members of the dominant racial group and views of racial minority group members. This and related efforts also identify asymmetries in the views of dominant and subordinate group members and suggest some unique elements of the Black-White divide in the United States. Third, I discuss the impact of competitive threat on policy attitudes and preferences. Perceptions of competitive threat matter. Fourth, I sketch out an application of the group position framework to theorizing changes in Whites' racial attitudes in the United States.

*Measuring Competitive Threat*

The first of the empirical tasks in my program of research on group position theory was developing measures of perceived competitive threat (Bobo, 1988a). The clearest point of differentiation from traditional models of prejudice comes in its emphasis on perceptions of threat. Blumer directs our attention to perceived group competition or group zero-sum access to important social resources. The group position model posits a need to assess the degree to which individuals feel their own group is at risk for losing significant resources to other social groups.

It is perhaps worth underscoring here that, first, these are *perceptions* of threat. The degree of correspondence with underlying objective conditions is a matter to be assessed rather than assumed. But second, it is essential to recall Blumer's emphasis on the socially constructed nature of racial group boundaries and identities, as well as the normative force and affective character of the sense of group position. This is threat as understood in a racialized social context and as a product of socially constructed meaning; it is not a simplistic reflection of strictly objective, realistic, and material conditions.

In developing questions to tap perceived group competition I drafted items that explicitly mention two groups, refer to opposed interests, and speak to fairly concrete outcomes such as economic rewards. This is, in short, a conservative way to measure perceptions of threat. My first opportunity to test such items came in the context of a survey concerning an intensive controversy over the fishing, hunting, and gathering rights of the Chippewa Indians in the state of Wisconsin. From 1983 until 1992, an explosive dispute emerged when the federal courts affirmed the historic treaty rights of the Chippewa Indians to hunt, fish, and gather other resources such as timber in most of what constitutes the upper third of the state of Wisconsin. Actual exercise of these rights by the Chippewa, especially with regard to fishing on the many lakes in the North Woods, resulted in intense conflict and antagonism. The traditional Chippewa practice of spear fishing became a potent symbol of the treaty dispute (Satz, 1991). Chippewa fishers had to face large and angry crowds throwing rocks and bottles and shouting such epithets as "Save a fish, spear an Indian" or "Save two Walleye, spear a pregnant squaw." One dramatic artifact of the treaty conflict is a flyer that features a hand aggressively brandishing a handgun pointed at the reader with the phrase "Spear this!" emblazoned across top and bottom. Several anti–treaty rights movement groups formed, under such names as "Protect America's Rights and Resources," "Equal Rights for Everyone," and "Stop Treaty Abuse." Violent confrontations at the lake boat landings occurred, the first electoral recall effort in more than 60 years was occasioned by the treaty conflict, and the dispute became a major concern for the state Department of Natural Resources, the attorney general, the congressional delegation, and the governor.

My 1990 Chippewa Indian treaty rights survey, a statewide telephone survey of Wisconsin residents, set out to test group position theory as compared to traditional prejudice and the symbolic racism model of such divisive racial politics (Bobo & Garcia, 1992). We successfully measured a sense of perceived threat. One item, for example, asked whether respondents felt that "many Indians have been getting ahead economically at the expense of many non-Indians." One third of White respondents agreed with this statement. More importantly, this question was followed with an open-ended probe asking individuals to explain why they felt that way. The results generally confirmed that respondents understood the question as asking whether they perceived a zero-sum material transfer of economic resources. The bulk of those respondents who gave *disagree* responses denied that progress for Native Americans automatically hurt the chances for others, or spoke to the generally economically disadvantaged circumstances of many Native Americans. Among those who agreed with the statement, responses emphasized that anyone would take advantage of the situation the Chippewa found themselves in, that some Chippewa were actually selling the fish to Whites rather than consuming it themselves, and that many Indians received taxpayer-supported benefits in a fashion that constituted a resource transfer, with the latter being the modal response among those agreeing with the statement.

A couple of examples from the open-ended remarks illustrate the point. A 40-year-old White male who worked as a machinist said: "Well, I don't know. It seems that the government is just backing them up and we pay for the license and the stocking programs and they seem to be getting ahead of us and away with everything." Or as a 57-year-old White male truck driver saw it: "If they are getting food stamps and welfare coming out of our taxes. I'm paying for them living without working. I'm working for them." Or in the words of a 40-year-old White female who worked as a bookkeeper: "It goes back to the same thing. They get quite a bit handed to them that they're doing [nothing] for. But the middle class people who work, [they] don't get anything handed to them."

Again, the point is not that these perceptions are accurate. Rather, it is that many people see themselves and others with whom they identify as losing ground to members of a racial minority group. That sense of losing relative position is a crucial conceptual distinction. It is what separates perceptions of threat from mere stereotypes or the types of resentments defined within the symbolic racism literature (Sears, 1988). They are not merely saying that the racial minority group is different or lesser, or even simply venting an affective hostility or resentment, but rather (and perhaps centrally) claiming that their relative status is significantly diminished by this difference. I will address in a moment the broader significance of such perceptions of threat.

*Modeling Competitive Threat in a Multiracial Social Context*

As part of the 1992 Los Angeles County Social Survey (LACSS), which I titled "A Study of Ethnic Antagonism in LA," I sought to measure perceptions of threat in a more fully multiracial context (Bobo, Zubrinsky, Johnson, & Oliver, 1994). In this study we developed a four-item, highly reliable measure of zero-sum group competition for access to economic resources, economic mobility, political influence, and housing. Using a split-ballot experimental format, questions were targeted on Blacks, Asians, or Latinos as potential zero-sum competitive threats.[3] My first objective in this research was to develop a model of the determinants of perceptions of such competitive threat (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996).

Following Blumer, we maintained that such perceptions should be rooted in racially specific beliefs about the societal opportunity structure. Blumer's argument emphasizes dominant group beliefs about collective status and entitlement. Since part of our interest was to extend the framework to include racial minority group members we focused attention on the distinct but closely related concept of racial alienation. We conceived of racial alienation as falling along a continuum ranging from the profound sense of group enfranchisement and entitlement most likely to occur among dominant racial group members to, at the opposite extreme, the profound sense of group disenfranchisement and grievance most likely to be found among subordinate or racial minority group members. The more that members of a racial group feel they are alienated and oppressed, the more likely they are to regard other racial groups as competitive threats to their own group's social position. This is an ironic prediction, since it suggests that in a multiracial context, one may find some of the highest levels of perceived threat from other groups among members of the most disadvantaged racial minority group, not among dominant racial group members.

Feelings of racial alienation have a collective dimension and become culturally shared ideas. They emerge from the historical experience and current social, political, and economic status niches occupied by members of a racial group. In order to understand why members of one group feel threatened by members of another group it is necessary to develop measures of how individuals feel about the

[3] The questions dealt with job competition ("More good jobs for Asians/Blacks/Hispanics means fewer good jobs for members of other groups"), political competition ("The more influence Asians/Blacks/Hispanics have in local politics the less influence members of other groups will have in local politics"), housing competition ("As more good housing and neighborhoods go to Asians/Blacks/Hispanics, the fewer good houses and neighborhoods there will be for members of other groups"), and general economic competition ("Many Asians/Blacks/ Hispanics have been trying to get ahead economically at the expense of other groups.") Alpha reliabilities ranged from .67 to .81 across race of respondent and race of target group, with an overall average of .74.

treatment, conditions, and opportunities that have historically faced members of their own group.[4]

The degree of racial alienation is assumed to correspond to a group's historical position in the social structure. With their institutionalized privileges, members of the dominant racial group will rarely feel alienated in this sense. Indeed, the more secure the relative power, economic, and status advantages of the dominant group, the less alienated and threatened they will feel. Members of racial minority groups, with their institutionalized disadvantages, would frequently feel such alienation. Among racial minority groups, the level of alienation would vary based on differences in the persistence, pervasiveness across domains of life, and extremity of inequality of life chances. This argument implies that members of more recent and voluntarily incorporated minority groups will feel less alienation than members of long-term and involuntarily incorporated minority groups. In short, the greater the degree of racial subordination, the greater the feeling of racial alienation. By implication, the overall tendency to perceive members of other groups as competitive threats is likely to correspond to the overall degree of racial alienation.

This is an important point since it differentiates the group position model from the simple self-interest model. Although under the group position model we expect that having a self-interested stake in a group struggle will often matter, we emphasize that feelings of threat and of alienation are the product of social and collective processes that derive from the long-term experiences and conditions that members of a racial group have faced. These ideas are shaped, as Blumer argued, by an ongoing process of collective social definition that cannot be reduced to the current status of individuals. This also suggests that with a longer history of relations between dominant and subordinate group members comes a more fully crystallized sense of relative group position. The shorter the history of group contact and interaction, the less well crystallized the sense of group position is likely to be.

Our analyses of the 1992 LACSS data produced several interesting patterns. First, as expected, Black Americans and Latinos were the most likely to perceive their relations with other racial minority groups in zero-sum terms. On average, approximately 40% of Black American and Latino respondents did so. In contrast, around 25% of White and Asian American respondents did so. Further, both Blacks and Latinos perceived greater competitive threat from Asians than they did

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[4] The questions used to measure racial alienation asked respondents to agree or disagree with each of the following statements: (1) American society owes people of my ethnic group a better chance in life than we currently have; (2) American society has provided people of my ethnic group a fair opportunity to get ahead in life; (3) I am grateful for all of the special opportunities people of my ethnic group have found in America; and (4) American society just hasn't dealt fairly with people of my ethnic background. The overall alpha reliability for the scale, pooling all races, was .65. It was typically lower within any specific racial category.

from one another. Asians felt the greatest threat from Blacks. And Whites felt the greatest threat from Asians and the least from Blacks.[5]

We did find, as expected, that racial alienation was the most consistently important predictor of perceptions of threat. However, there are some noteworthy differences. Among White respondents, feelings of racial alienation were connected to perceptions of threat only from Blacks, not to threat from Asians or from Latinos, a pattern consistent with the idea that Whites' sense of group position relative to Black Americans is more firmly psychologically and culturally grounded; it is more fully crystallized. In addition, racial alienation was a fairly consistent determinant of perceptions of threat among racial minority respondents.

We stressed that perceptions of threat spring from multiple sources, requiring a concern with self-interest, more conventional elements of racial prejudice such as affect and stereotyping, and what sociologists would call stratification beliefs or general socioeconomic ideology (Kluegel & Smith, 1986). But racial alienation was the most consistently important factor, and self-interest effects on threat were found only among our racial minority respondents.

Of interest, these results immediately call into question the simple equation of degree of threat to a matter of group size or numbers (cf. Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989; Quillian, 1995). At least three other factors seemed to be involved: the relative economic resources of a group matter, as suggested by the greater perception of threat felt among Whites from Asians as compared to Latinos; the specific social domain in question matters, so that, for example, Whites feel the absolute lowest level of threat in terms of competition for housing from Blacks; and the prior group history, overtness, and intensity of conflict matters, as suggested by the high degree of Black threat perceived by Asians as compared to the lower threat they perceive from the numerically much larger Latino population.

### *Competitive Threat and Policy Views*

Although I would submit that perceptions of competitive threat are important to understand in their own right, it is natural to examine other social and political outcomes of such perceptions (Bobo, 1983, 1988a, 1988b). In particular, I have

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[5] There is some evidence of domain specificity to perceived threat. For example, the absolute lowest level of perceived threat was reported by Whites in relation to housing competition with Black Americans. This is not surprising given the extremity of Black-White racial residential segregation (Denton, 1994; Massey & Denton, 1993). There is also some indication that Whites perceived more political threat from Latinos and greater economic threat from Asians. Despite the low level of residential threat Whites perceived from Blacks, the group position model provides considerable theoretical leverage in understanding Whites' attitudes on racial residential integration (Bobo & Zubrinsky, 1996; Zubrinsky & Bobo, 1996).

argued that perceptions of threat are likely to be a major influence on policy views and preferences. I will briefly summarize two examples of such analyses here.

In the Chippewa treaty rights survey we found that perceptions of threat are powerful determinants of attitudes toward the treaties and of views on the appropriate state response to the legal validation of treaty rights. The greater the perception of competitive threat, the more hostile the attitudes toward the treaty rights themselves and the more antitreaty a posture an individual is likely to support in terms of state policy. With respect to attitudes on the treaty rights themselves, group competitive threat is the single most important variable, outweighing stereotypes, negative affect, and symbolic racism. Narrow self-interest, as gauged by involvement in those activities most directly touched by the treaty rights—involvement in sports fishing—affects perceptions of threat and has both direct and indirect effects on attitudes on the treaty rights themselves (Bobo & Tuan, 1996). As Blumer would expect, then, the weight of a self-interested stake in the issue does come to matter, even more so if the outcome variable is issue salience, attitude centrality, or subsequent political activism (see also Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995).

My second major effort to model policy attitudes on the basis of the group position model involved data from the 1992 LACSS with respect to immigration policy. Here, the objective was in part to compare the efficacy of symbolic racism and group position for understanding the policy views of Whites and Blacks on immigration (Bobo & Hutchings, 1994). We found that both symbolic racism and perceptions of threat were important determinants of anti-immigrant policy views among White respondents. Of the two, the latter had the stronger effects, but both clearly mattered. Among Black Americans, however, only perceived competitive threat mattered, not symbolic racism. These patterns held whether the immigration issues were framed in terms of Asian immigrants or Latino immigrants. In addition, Black Americans seemed less likely to translate perceptions of threat into a hostile policy stance on immigration, especially when framed in terms of Latino immigration as compared to Whites. This suggests that by virtue of Blacks' collective history of racial oppression and subsequent understanding of a group position in the American racial order, even when threatened Blacks are reluctant to see government act against other racial minorities.

### *Understanding Long-Term Changes in Racial Attitudes*

In *Racial Attitudes in America* (1985), Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, and I documented a dramatic change from the 1940s, when crucial baseline national surveys of Whites' attitudes were conducted, to the mid-1980s. Simply put, in the early 1940s a substantial national consensus on racial segregation, anti-Black discrimination, and belief in the innate intellectual inferiority of Blacks characterized White opinion. By the 1980s, a near complete reversal occurred as a broad national consensus against racial segregation and discrimination emerged. The perception

of Blacks as the innate intellectual inferiors of Whites underwent a particularly quick and rapid decline. At the time, we did not venture a theoretical interpretation of this change, but stressed that it must reflect a profound transformation of social norms with regard to race.

Drawing on Blumer's (and Allport's) mandate to consider the historical development of group relations, the social organizational and interest-based grounding of racial attitudes, and the dual underlying axes of the sense of group position, namely, both hierarchy and identity, or the interconnection of the dominance-oppression dimension and the inclusion-exclusion dimension, I believe that we can now formulate a theoretical account of how and why White racial attitudes changed as they did. Based on the group position framework, I argue that in the post–World War II period the racial attitudes of many White Americans underwent a shift from Jim Crow racism to laissez-faire racism. As part of this change, we have seen the virtual disappearance of overt bigotry (at least in polite society), of demands for state-imposed segregation, of advocacy of anti-Black exclusion and discrimination in the labor market, and of adherence to the belief that Blacks are the categorical intellectual and temperamental inferiors of Whites. The decline of full-blown Jim Crow racism, however, has not resulted in its opposite: a thoroughly antiracist popular ideology based on an embracing and democratic vision of the common humanity, worth, and place in the polity for Blacks alongside Whites. Instead, the institutionalized racial inequalities created by the long slavery and subsequent Jim Crow eras are now popularly accepted and condoned under a modern free market or laissez-faire racist ideology (Bobo & Smith, 1998).

Laissez-faire racism involves persistent negative stereotyping of Black Americans, a tendency to blame Blacks themselves for the Black-White gap in socioeconomic standing, and resistance to meaningful policy efforts to ameliorate America's racist social conditions and practices, with the latter views substantially rooted in perceptions of threat and the protection of collective group privileges. Jim Crow racism was at its zenith during a historical epoch when Black Americans remained a largely Southern, rural, agricultural workforce; at a time when anti-Black bias was formal state policy; and at a time when most White Americans comfortably accepted and espoused the idea that Blacks were inherently inferior. Laissez-faire racism is crystallizing in the current period as a new dominant racial belief system. It does so at a time when Black Americans are a heavily urbanized, nationally dispersed, and occupationally heterogeneous population; at a time when state policy is formally race-neutral and committed to antidiscrimination; and when most White Americans prefer a more volitional and cultural, as opposed to inherent and biological, interpretation of Blacks' disadvantaged status.

Jim Crow racist ideology reflected the economic and political needs, as well as the prevailing cultural ideas, of a specific historical period and set of actors. The setting was the post–Civil War American South. The critical actors were the old Southern planter elite. The cultural trend was the rise and scientific legitimacy

accorded to notions of biological racism. As the economic and political power of these historic conditions and actors waned, as cultural trends turned against biological racism, and as the power resources of the Black community rose, Jim Crow social structures and ultimately Jim Crow ideology and attitudes were defeated. In the Blumerian framework, the process of running social definition that undergirded the Jim Crow social order broke down as the positioning and power resources of Black Americans changed (Bobo & Smith, 1998).

Rising from the collapse of Jim Crow racism, my colleagues and I have argued, is laissez-faire racism. The latter set of ideas legitimates persistent Black disadvantage in the United States, but does so in a manner appropriate to a modern, nationwide, postindustrial economy and polity. In effect, we have arrived at a point when a significant segment of White America effectively condones as much Black disadvantage and segregation as the legacy of historic discrimination along with modern-day free-market forces and informal social mechanisms can reproduce or exacerbate (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1997).

From the vantage point of group position theory, as the economic and political foundations of the Jim Crow social order weakened, race-based inequalities, which remain substantial and have worsened in several respects despite the growth of a Black middle class, had to be defended and justified on new and different grounds. Laissez-faire racist ideology and attitudes emerged to defend racial inequalities under sharply changed, indeed much more fluid and permeable economic and political conditions. It is the sense of entitlement and threat, as delineated in Blumer's group position theory of prejudice, that we believe gives us the greatest theoretical leverage on accounting for changes in Whites' racial attitudes in the United States.

Individual-level data provide support for aspects of this theory. First, Bobo and Kluegel (1997), using data from the 1990 General Social Survey, show that Jim Crow racism constitutes a distinct dimension of racial attitudes, correlated with but quite plainly distinct from the modern stereotypes and beliefs characteristic of laissez-faire racism. Second, sociodemographic factors, especially age and education, more strongly affect Jim Crow racism than laissez-faire racism (Bobo & Kluegel, 1997). Younger generations have been socialized in an era when Jim Crow racism is no longer essential to the maintenance of White privilege, as well as in a time when Jim Crow racism is considered inconsistent with American values or at least socially unacceptable. More highly educated persons are exposed more directly to the idea that Jim Crow racism is unacceptable. On the other hand, because expressions of contemporary stereotypes and the denial of social responsibility for Blacks' conditions are more clearly perceived to support White privilege, we found that such outlooks are more broadly consensually held across sociodemographic groups.

Third, socioeconomic ideology—how people perceive and explain general economic inequality—more strongly affects laissez-faire racism than it affects Jim Crow racism. This patterns flows from the decline in the economic importance of

distinctly Southern Jim Crow racism and the solidification of an American national pattern of racial inequality that does not place an explicit premium on a racial division of labor, but that is all the same comfortable with sharply disparate life chances associated with race. If Jim Crow racism is no longer seen to serve the defense of privilege, then there is no reason to expect that beliefs that justify the overall stratification order will affect it. If elements of laissez-faire racism do more effectively defend what remains of White skin privilege, then justifications of economic inequality in general should be connected to such outlooks.

## Closely Related Theoretical Models

Three other approaches to race relations have much in common with the group position model: realistic group conflict models (LeVine & Campbell, 1972), Jackman's ideological control and paternalism model (Jackman, 1994; Jackman & Crane, 1986; Jackman & Muha, 1984; Jackman & Senter, 1983); and Sidanius's social dominance model (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius, 1993; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). It is important to clarify how the group position theory differs from each of these approaches.

The primary distinction between the group position model and realistic group conflict models is twofold. First, theories of realistic conflict stress the objective basis of struggles between racial groups. The group position approach raises questions about such a formulation, primarily on the grounds that "racial groupings"—the sense of identification and belonging with a particular racial group—is a psychological and affect-infused attachment. Whatever economic or political struggle takes place between racial groups of necessity implicates a psychological attachment, not merely concrete resources. In short, "racial conflict" can never be purely material from the vantage point of group position theory. Second, as stressed above, there is a normative and affective aspect to the sense of group position that, again, adds elements to the understanding of racial relations and conflict not readily derived from a theory of purely material conflicts. Yet as argued above, the group position approach shares the conflict theory concern with collective or group interests while not seeing conflict between groups as purely rational and instrumental in character.

Jackman's ideological control and paternalism theory argues that the place of "conflict" in intergroup relations has been exaggerated. In particular, she stresses that dominant groups attempt to create stable "expropriative" relations with subordinate group members. The most effective way to do so, she argues, is to eschew overt hostility and conflict in favor of ideological control. A critical tool in the struggle to control the ideas people live by, and that group interaction comes to be governed by, is the development of paternalistic orientations. In such ideological structures, dominant group members couple rejection of the economic, political, and status aspirations of subordinate group members with positive feelings of

warmth (or at least of neutral affect) toward subordinate group members. The primary departure of the group position framework from the ideological control and paternalism model, is that it, first, has more to do with periods of change and open conflict, and second, specifies the mechanisms that prompt dominant group members to regard pressure for change as undesirable. Jackman's approach articulates a number of the steps taken to maintain a stable relation of domination and inequality. But as Blumer pointed out, the underlying power relation between groups, and the type of vigilance with respect to "running definition" of group relations, can shift importantly before the ideological and material arsenal necessary to turn back minority groups' demands gets activated.

Sidanius and Pratto's social dominance theory posits the existence of a powerful individual difference factor, social dominance orientation, along which individuals and groups vary (1999). Members of dominant groups compared to subordinate group members, and men relative to women, typically are found to possess high levels of social dominance orientation: a desire for one's group to occupy a controlling or superior position in social relations. The evidence for the existence of this individual difference factor is strong (Pratto et al., 1994); so is the evidence of its differentiation by gender (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1994); and so is the evidence of its influence on important racial attitudes and racial policy views (Sidanius, Devereux, & Pratto, 1992; Sidanius et al., 1996). The theory shares the group position model's emphasis on feelings of proper entitlement relative to other social groups. Perceptions of competition and threat, however, are not clearly invoked by social dominance theory. Thus, somewhat like the value-added contribution of group position theory relative to Jackman's approach, the group position model specifies some of the factors and dynamics that should activate dominance orientations and protection of group position (i.e., perceived threat). The social dominance model is most effective as a description of the mechanism of system stability in the presence of unequal group relations. The group position model provides greater leverage on likely foci and engines of contestation and change.

## Questions for Future Research on the Group Position Paradigm

Blumer did not elaborate on the process of group identity formation or why such attachments seem to carry wide-ranging social significance. It is important to attempt to articulate the group position framework with the powerful line of research on social identity processes (Tajfel, 1982; J. C. Turner, 1987). There is nothing inimical to the group position framework in social identity theory's emphasis on process of categorization, social comparison, and self-esteem motives. Indeed, Tajfel's (1982) emphasis on presumed common or shared fate as a potential mechanism underlying the evidence of ingroup favoritism is consistent with the thrust of the group position approach. I think it would also be important to more expressly articulate the group position framework with the line of work on

status expectation states theory, which may provide an analysis of how the sense of group position is enacted in face-to-face interactional settings and small group environments (Meeker, 1981; Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). We need fully elaborated empirical models of the elements of the sense of group position. For example, only now am I doing work that expressly uses a measure of group identity in connection to stereotyping and perceived group threat. As Blumer would have emphasized, more work needs to be done to connect the broader public sphere of leadership and debate to opinion formation and change (cf. Zaller, 1992).

At the outset I argued for viewing the group position model as a framework for integrating a concern with affect, stereotyping, and interests in understanding prejudice as social force. I think there is great merit in this approach and hope that I have begun down the road of what Robert K. Merton calls "disciplined eclecticism." I am not trying to erect a nonfalsifiable typology, but rather an integrated way of dealing with the evident facts of racial identities, affect, stereotypes, and group interests within a racially stratified social order.

## Conclusion

Blumer sketched the elements of an analytically powerful sociological approach to racial prejudice. The core contribution of this approach is to stress that prejudice involves a good deal more than negative beliefs and feelings, that in order to grasp why prejudice is a remarkably adaptive social force one must recognize that it concerns emotion-laden, normatively powerful, and interest-infused commitment to a preferred group position. Blumer's declaration of sociological primacy notwithstanding, Allport (1954) would surely find the effort to link historical, cultural, situational, and phenomenological levels of analysis very appealing.

The social phenomenon of racial prejudice is not just a story of bad ideas and a biased reading of relevant social information; it is not just a story of noxious socialization and reverence for the symbols of the tribe; it is also, and perhaps principally, a story of self as positioned in a racialized and stratified social world. It is a story of the fusing of identity, interests, sense of proper place, and entitlement. It is, in short, a story of group positions.

Blumer did not apply himself to the tasks of sustained theoretical exposition of this framework. Neither he nor his students set about the task of developing empirical applications and tests of the framework. I believe it is critical now to turn to these tasks. We will not move forward as social scientists in our theoretical understanding, I fear, unless we fully elaborate, test, and probe the meaning of Blumer's insight. We will surely fail to progress as committed, enlightened citizens in a democratic society if our understanding of the problem of color line fails to acknowledge what appears to be a basic element of why it constitutes such a resilient social force: it forges highly durable links between identities and interests.

This is precisely why Allport wrote that "in group disputes it is—we must admit—exceedingly difficult to distinguish realistic conflict from prejudice proper" (1954, p. 230). Group position theory gives the tools to understand and sensibly parse just this fusion of processes.

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