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Contesting the Meaning of Intergroup Disadvantage: Towards a Psychology of Resistance

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A prevailing view in psychology is that intergroup disadvantage poses a serious threat to psychological well-being. Lower self-esteem and out-group favoritism are two of the most examined forms of psychological damage thought to follow from intergroup disadvantage. We review theory and research on lower self-esteem and out-group favoritism with close attention to the nature of the evidence suggesting that intergroup disadvantage is detrimental psychologically. We argue that this evidence is not as strong or unambiguous as is widely believed. This has likely led to an underestimation of psychological resistance to disadvantage—that middle ground between the extremes of surviving at subsistence levels of psychological well-being and confronting disadvantage. We propose that greater attention to the psychological meaning that the disadvantaged give their position enables a more accurate assessment of the diverse forms of psychological resistance to intergroup disadvantage.

Inequality is on many peoples' minds. Recent popular revolts around the world have focused on the ways in which contemporary practice and policy may systematically disadvantage many in society (i.e., the "99%"). And, a great deal of recent work across the human sciences documents that the most disadvantaged in society suffer economic, educational, political, health, and other detriments (Adler et al., 1994; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Pascoe & Smart Richman,

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2009; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Parallel to the view in more macrosocial fields that disadvantage causes many material detriments, the microsocial approach of social psychology tends to view disadvantage as causing many psychological detriments. Psychological work on stigma, discrimination, stereotype threat, low power, low status, microaggressions, etc. suggests a wide variety of ways in which members of disadvantaged groups suffer psychologically as a result of their material disadvantage (for reviews, see Barreto & Ellemers, 2010; Crocker & Major, 1989; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002; Steele, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These include poorer individual mental health, coping strategies, cognitive function and performance, emotion and self-regulation, interpersonal relationships, and less positive group identity and group function.

Although there is considerable work on coping with disadvantage and “protecting against” or “buffering” stigma, most of this work views such efforts as attempts to mitigate against the otherwise deleterious psychological effects of disadvantage (Barreto & Ellemers, 2010; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Henry, 2009; Major et al., 2002). Without these efforts, the presumption is that the injury of material disadvantage is accompanied by the insult of psychological debilitation. Thus, the prevailing view is that the best that the disadvantaged can do is to work hard to survive at subsistence levels of psychological well-being. Without constant effort to survive psychologically, societal assaults to their self-esteem and the like would presumably lead the disadvantaged to self-hatred, depression, and despair. Of course, a quite separate literature in sociology and social and political psychology eschews this focus on survival at subsistence levels of psychological well-being, preferring instead to examine what leads the disadvantaged to protest against their position. This work on “collective action” emphasizes an angry and efficacious view of societal disadvantage that fuels direct confrontational action to reduce disadvantage for the group as a whole (for recent reviews, see Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012; van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, 2012).

Thus, when considered as a whole, psychology appears to characterize the disadvantaged as having two choices regarding their position in society—to survive at subsistence levels of psychological well-being or to fight to alter societal systems of disadvantage. However, no one can fight all the time. And, there is much more to life than subsistence survival. Thus, psychology’s focus on the two extremes of surviving and fighting disadvantage has left the everyday psychology of resistance underexamined (see also Haslam & Reicher, 2012). Between the two extremes of surviving and fighting lies the everyday experience of giving psychological meaning to one’s disadvantage by perceiving, interpreting, feeling, and acting on it. Despite several attempts to explicate the diversity of ways in which disadvantage can be resisted psychologically (e.g., Pettigrew, 1967; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990), little contemporary work in psychology does this (but see recent attempts by Pratto, Stewart, & Bou Zeineddine, 2013 and Sweetman, Leach, Spears, Pratto, & Saab, 2013).

As sociologists (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Raby, 2005; Vanneman & Cannon, 1987) and other macrosocial theorists (Gramsci, 1971; Sandoval, 2000; Scott, 1990) have pointed out, psychological resistance to disadvantage comes in diverse forms, varying in terms of how overt or covert it is, and/or how active or passive it is, for example. However, at the heart of psychological resistance is opposition to dominance by determining for oneself the psychological meaning of one's disadvantage (Fanon, 1967; Martín-Baró, 1994; Sandoval, 2000). More specifically, psychological resistance is the myriad ways in which the disadvantaged assert their own view of themselves and the world despite dominant pressures to accept societal messages to the contrary. As shown in macrosocial analyses, psychological resistance can come in the form of a subculture's rituals (e.g., Hall & Jefferson, 1976) or covert but subversive ways of resisting management strictures in the workplace (Yücesan-Özdemir, 2003; see also Scott, 1990). Claimed ignorance and inability to learn, feigned misunderstanding of instructions, and losing track of time during coffee and lunch breaks, can all be forms of psychological resistance to material disadvantage. In psychology, psychological resistance has been observed in implicit resistance to gender stereotypical roles (e.g., de Lemus, Spears, Bukowski, Lupiáñez, & Moya, 2013) through to the use of humor in the form of satire and ridicule directed at powerful others (Billig, 2005).

What unites all of these forms of psychological resistance is that they represent active, if at times subtle or covert, attempts to resist material disadvantage in psychological terms rather than in the material terms of confrontational protest designed to directly encourage societal change. Although such psychological efforts at resistance have often been viewed as poor substitutes for protest (e.g., as "social creativity" or "weapons of the weak"), psychological resistance is a clear form of opposition. Psychological resistance is also a more practical exercise of power than most psychological treatments allow. In the context of violent repression, structural disadvantage, political marginalization, and societal devaluation, the psychological meaning of their position is the one thing over which the disadvantaged exercise the most control (Gramsci, 1971). Through refusing to internalize material disadvantage, psychological resistance enables people to maintain that poverty of the purse does not equate to poverty of the spirit.

Resistance in psychological (rather than material) terms is of clear importance to the discipline of psychology; indeed, it is what psychologists can best study. Additionally, psychological resistance is likely to be more common than the direct protest of disadvantage. As Gramsci (1971) pointed out some time ago, the "frontal assault" of direct confrontation of the advantaged is exceedingly difficult in Western liberal democracies where ostensibly egalitarian ideology and practice reinforce disadvantage at many different levels of the society (see also Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Thus, Gramsci argued that in societies where the "cultural hegemony" of the advantaged prevails, the disadvantaged are best served by engaging in a "war of position" that aims to strategically counter the hegemony

of the advantaged through the pursuit of their own culture and system of value. Unlike the direct, obvious, and often short-lived confrontation of the advantaged, this psychological resistance is a more strategic, multifaceted, and protracted challenge focused on freeing the disadvantaged from hegemony. Rather than a rush to the barricades, psychological resistance is a “long march to freedom” that can also serve as a basis for more direct protest when it is necessary, and when it is wise (Fanon, 1967; Gramsci, 1971).

In this article, we build upon the notion of psychological resistance by reviewing theory and research on lower self-esteem and out-group favoritism in disadvantaged groups. We suggest that inattention to the psychological meaning that the disadvantaged give their position has enabled ambiguous evidence to be interpreted as indicative of psychological damage. In some cases, even contrary evidence regarding lower self-esteem and out-group favoritism is interpreted as indicative of the psychological damage of disadvantage. This has likely led to an underestimation of psychological resistance to disadvantage. Indeed, having equal levels of self-esteem and equally positive implicit evaluations of in-group and out-group may be seen as impressive psychological resistance in the face of societal devaluation. We then elaborate on reasons why even apparent out-group favoritism may be indicative of psychological resistance rather than internalized inferiority, focusing on the multiple meanings that can be conveyed by highlighting an out-group’s “superiority.” As we elaborate in our conclusion, this is an issue that has more than theoretical importance—the social and policy stakes are high. As Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (1999) argue, a focus on psychological detriments caused by intergroup disadvantage risks directing policy and practice toward palliative support for the psychologically damaged disadvantaged, rather than toward material disadvantage itself.

The Psychological Meaning of Intergroup Disadvantage

In psychology, as in many other behavioral sciences, there is a great deal of evidence that material intergroup disadvantage is linked to disadvantages in physical health and well-being (for reviews, see Adler et al., 1994; Clark et al., 1999; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). The poor, disenfranchised minorities, and other disadvantaged groups suffer greater stress and illness and have poorer chances of recovery. In addition to these physical effects of intergroup disadvantage, psychology has long viewed material disadvantage as constituting a psychological threat to the disadvantaged that must be protected against if it is not to cause the psychological damage of lower self-esteem, self-harm, undermined motivation to succeed, and the like (see Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 1999, for a critical discussion). As Steele (1997) put it, the disadvantaged face a “threat in the air.”

Although there is a small link between perceiving discrimination against oneself and poorer psychological well-being (for a quantitative synthesis, see Pascoe

& Smart Richman, 2009), there is much less evidence than is commonly presumed that intergroup disadvantage translates directly into psychological detriment (for discussions, see Crocker & Major, 1989; Pettigrew, 1967; Vanneman & Cannon, 1987; for quantitative syntheses, see Smith et al., 2012; Twenge & Crocker, 2002). In fact, decades of research on relative deprivation suggest that the disadvantaged suffer poorer physical and psychological well-being than the advantaged mainly when they view their lot as an individual rather than as a shared, systemic, disadvantage of their group (for a quantitative synthesis, see Smith & Ortiz, 2002). The study of individual self-esteem among the disadvantaged is perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of a failure to find direct and obvious psychological detriment from intergroup disadvantage. This influential line of research highlights the importance of examining the psychological meaning that the disadvantaged give their position, rather than assuming that the disadvantaged necessarily internalize societal devaluation and thus suffer lower self-esteem.

Lower Self-Esteem

The extensive research in the United States on ethnic differences in self-esteem shows little evidence that disadvantaged groups suffer lower self-esteem. In fact, in a quantitative synthesis of over 250 independent comparisons of White and Black children's self-esteem conducted by Gray-Little and Hafdahl (2000), Blacks had slightly higher self-esteem than Whites. Importantly, there was little difference between the studies conducted as early as 1965 and those conducted later. In a quantitative synthesis of an even larger set of studies, Twenge and Crocker (2002) found Black self-esteem to be equal to that of Whites, even in studies conducted between 1956 and 1969. Thus, Black self-esteem was equal to that of Whites before the equality in law brought about by the civil rights movement. In addition, Blacks born before 1949 showed equal self-esteem to Whites despite the fact that they were born under the institutionalized societal devaluation of segregated schools only lifted in principle in 1954. Although there is less extensive evidence regarding Hispanic-Americans, Twenge and Crocker's quantitative synthesis showed this disadvantaged ethnic minority to have about equal self-esteem to that of Whites.

That Black and Hispanic people in the United States have self-esteem equal to that of Whites should be taken as evidence against the view that intergroup disadvantage typically leads to psychological damage. Yet, this comprehensive evidence tends not to be taken as disconfirmation of the popular hypothesis. Instead, many researchers suggest that ethnic minority in-group identity, social creativity, or social support buffer against the lower self-esteem they expect to observe—thereby maintaining the original hypothesis of psychological detriment following from disadvantage (for reviews, see Barreto & Ellemers, 2010; Crocker et al., 1998; Henry, 2009; Major et al., 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The ambiguity in the interpretation of ethnic minority's self-esteem is further highlighted in Twenge and Crocker's (2002) quantitative synthesis of Asian-American self-esteem. Although they found Asian Americans to show moderately lower self-esteem than Whites, this was not interpreted as an indication of psychological damage to Asian Americans from disadvantage. Instead, it was suggested that the lower self-esteem of Asian Americans was at least partly due to a modesty based in lower individualism and other more collectivist values and practices. That values and practices can help determine empirical differences between groups in self-esteem is one important reason to attend to the psychological meaning that the disadvantaged themselves give to their group membership and to their position in society. If Asian-Americans' lower self-esteem can be the product of Asian-Americans' values and practices, then surely Hispanic-American's equal self-esteem and African American's higher self-esteem can be the product of these group's values and practices. For example, recent research on contingencies of self-worth has shown groups to vary a good deal in how much others' evaluations of them, competition, physical appearance, and suchlike serve as bases of their self-esteem (for a review, see Crocker, Luhtanen, & Sommers, 2004).

More profoundly, it is unclear what level of self-esteem would be viewed as a sign of healthy and appropriate self-evaluation among the disadvantaged. As equal or higher self-esteem than the advantaged are interpreted as the result of self-protective strategies, even these apparent signs of psychological well-being are denied to the disadvantaged. In essence, this approach to self-esteem imposes the psychological meaning of intergroup disadvantage from outside, obscuring the need to understand the psychological meaning that the disadvantaged provide to themselves. As it turns out, members of disadvantaged groups have long offered alternative hypotheses about the psychological meaning of their lot that could be used to complicate psychological approaches.

Disadvantage Speaks

For decades, poets, priests, and politicians from disadvantaged groups have argued against the view that their psychology is determined in large part by the material fact of disadvantage. In *The Fire Next Time*, African-American writer James Baldwin (1963) explicitly criticized the idea that African Americans had no choice but to evaluate themselves by the standards of the "White world":

White people, who had robbed Black people of their liberty and who profited by this theft every hour that they lived, had no moral ground on which to stand. And those virtues preached but not practiced by the White world were merely another means of holding Negroes in subjection (p. 23).

Across the human sciences, scholars from disadvantaged groups have also argued that the psychology of the disadvantaged is less dependent on the

standards of the advantaged than is often presumed. The sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois's (1903/1994) *The Souls of Black Folk* is often cited in psychology as arguing that "... the facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate." (p. 6) However, this book is actually a hymnal for Black people's psychological resistance to racism, through faith, patience, humor, rhyme, indignation, cynicism, song, and so on. Similarly, scholars of liberation psychology have long argued that while the debilitating intent and potential of oppression is clear, its outcome is not, because psychological resistance is natural and necessary for the disadvantaged (e.g., Fanon, 1967; Martín-Baró, 1994). This view has been echoed in numerous political, historical, and other macrosocial approaches to psychological resistance to material disadvantage (e.g., Gramsci, 1971; Sandoval, 2000; Scott, 1990; Vanneman & Cannon, 1987). Despite regular claims of taking the perspective of the disadvantaged, little psychological work starts from the assumption that the disadvantaged may determine for themselves the psychological meaning that they give their existence (of which disadvantage is only a part).

Out-Group Favoritism

Another of the oft-discussed examples of the supposed psychological damage of disadvantage is the phenomenon called out-group favoritism (self-hatred, inferiority complex, or internalized prejudice, in other disciplines). In psychology, the assumption that a normal and healthy psychology leads individuals to favor themselves and their own kind over others means that out-group favoritism—in the form of preferential evaluation and treatment of an advantaged out-group—is taken as an unambiguous sign that the disadvantaged suffer psychologically from their position in society (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

One of the most cited empirical examples of out-group favoritism is that of Clark and Clark's "doll studies" where White and Black children were asked to indicate a preference for Black or White dolls (for a review, see Clark & Clark, 1947). These studies are typically presented as documenting healthy White in-group favoritism and debilitating Black out-group favoritism because Black children did not favor Black dolls as much as White children favored White dolls. In more recent studies of out-group favoritism, the disadvantaged can show their self-hatred by preferring to interact with advantaged peers; believing the advantaged to be more agentic, successful, or good in general; or allotting more symbolic or material resources to an advantaged out-group than to a disadvantaged in-group (for reviews, see Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001; Crocker & Major, 1989; Diehl, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Theoretical perspectives. System justification theory proposes that people are motivated to justify existing societal arrangements, whether they advantage or disadvantage their in-group. Based on the assumption that this system justification motive overrides motives for a positive in-group identity, system justification theory predicts that disadvantaged groups will show less in-group favoritism than advantaged groups (Jost et al., 2004). Thus, evidence of out-group favoritism is taken at face value to indicate that disadvantaged groups have internalized their position and thus evaluate themselves negatively (Jost et al., 2004). Even when disadvantaged groups show in-group favoritism, it is suggested that this apparently positive evaluation of the in-group belies a deeper, more implicit, preference for the advantaged (e.g., Jost, Pelham, & Carvalho, 2002). Thus, as in the study of ethnic minority self-esteem, system justification theory doubts apparent evidence of psychological well-being among the disadvantaged.

Social dominance theory focuses on a “general tendency for humans to form and maintain group-based hierarchy” (Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004, p. 846). One of its key propositions is that the endorsement of “legitimizing myths” by both advantaged and disadvantaged groups leads to “behavioral asymmetry” between the groups. Put simply, members of advantaged groups are said to act in more in-group favoring ways than members of disadvantaged groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, chapter 9). Disadvantaged groups instead engage in more self-debilitating behavior such as crime, violence, and intellectual underperformance. In this way, social dominance theory views the disadvantaged as collaborators in their devaluation in society (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Another influential theory that broaches the issue of out-group favoritism is social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In contrast to system justification and social dominance theory, social identity theory is more concerned with the social structural conditions under which the disadvantaged accept or reject their position. For example, out-group favoritism is thought likely when “social mobility” out of a disadvantaged in-group is possible because intergroup boundaries are perceived as permeable, and/or when status differences are perceived as a legitimate basis for their devaluation in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wright et al., 1990; see also Derks, van Laar, Ellemers, & Raghoe, 2015; Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, & Iacovello, 2015; Tausch, Saguy, & Bryson, 2015). Nevertheless, when out-group favoritism is observed it is taken to indicate the psychological damage of disadvantage, which is dubbed “negative social identity” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Psychological meaning. Notwithstanding the many important differences between theories of system justification, social dominance, and social identity, they share the view that out-group favoritism is an unambiguous indicator of the psychological damage that intergroup disadvantage has. However, there are at least three reasons to doubt that the psychological meaning of out-group favoritism is so straightforward.

First, the psychological meaning of out-group favoritism is ambiguous because out-group favoritism is a heterogeneous concept that is assessed in a wide variety of ways (for reviews, see Bettencourt et al., 2001; Diehl, 1990). Out-group favoritism can be assessed with either direct (“explicit”) or indirect (“implicit”) methods; by attributing positive and negative attributes to groups; by allocating positive and negative resources, or positive and negative treatment; or by preferences for things produced by the groups (e.g., essays, t-shirts). When resources are allocated, these may be symbolic or material (e.g., grades vs. money). The sheer number of ways that out-group favoritism is examined makes it difficult to know if each is equally indicative of poorer psychological well-being when it is expressed by the disadvantaged.

A second ambiguity in interpreting the psychological meaning of expressions of out-group favoritism comes from the fact that the construct is purely relative. A disadvantaged group is said to show out-group favoritism when it gives itself very few resources and gives the advantaged many resources. Or, a disadvantaged group is said to show out-group favoritism when it gives itself many resources and gives the advantaged slightly more. Because the notion of favoritism focuses on the magnitude of a relative difference, it is unable to specify the quality of this difference and therefore it leaves its psychological meaning for the disadvantaged ambiguous. As we discuss in more detail below, there are many reasons to ‘prefer’ an advantaged group that has nothing to do with devaluing one’s disadvantaged group. Such ‘preference’ can instead reflect reality constraints, or have a strategic, ingroup-favoring agenda.

Third, there is ambiguity in what psychological meaning can be inferred from the characteristics that the disadvantaged attribute to groups in studies of out-group favoritism. Characteristics such as power, agency, competence, and dominance are seen as inherently “status-defining” characteristics that are attributed to the advantaged, whereas characteristics such as warmth, communality, and morality are seen as “alternative” characteristics that are attributed to the disadvantaged. Ascribing more “high-status” characteristics to the out-group and more “low-status” characteristics to the in-group is seen to justify the in-group’s disadvantage. This view is central to social dominance theory and system justification theory, as well as being central to many sociofunctional models of intergroup stereotyping (e.g., Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Eagly & Mladinic, 1994). However, this view presumes that the disadvantaged and the advantaged share a consensual view of the characteristics possessed by each group and that their ascription of these characteristics has the same psychological meaning for disadvantaged or advantaged alike. Despite the importance of this assumption, it is rarely examined empirically (for reviews, see Bettencourt et al., 2001; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Spears, Jetten, & Doosje, 2001). It is simply assumed that expressions of out-group favoritism through stereotyping the advantaged as more agentic, powerful, and competent show that the disadvantaged think poorly of

themselves (for reviews, see Bettencourt et al., 2001; Diehl, 1990). Or, based on the assumption of stereotype consensus, many studies prevent comparisons by simply combining the stereotypes of advantaged and disadvantaged groups. For example, in the most extensive cross-cultural study of sex stereotypes, women and men's beliefs about the two groups are not formally compared (Williams & Best, 1990). And, in nearly every study of competence and warmth stereotypes, members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups are examined with no attention to their group membership or its material position (for a review, see Cuddy et al., 2008).

Surprisingly little research has examined the psychological meaning of out-group favoritism by the disadvantaged. As a result, little consideration has been given to the possibility that the disadvantaged may be expressing psychological resistance when they show apparent out-group favoritism by stereotyping the advantaged as especially agentic, powerful, and competent. Indeed, in the context of a cultural hegemony that aims to assert the lesser value of the disadvantaged, the psychological meaning that they give their own and others presumed characteristics is an obvious battleground (Tajfel & Turner 1979; outside of psychology, see Gramsci, 1971; Sandoval, 2000; Vanneman & Cannon, 1987). As Audre Lorde put it, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Disagreeing with the presumed consensus in stereotypes and altering the meaning that one gives stereotypes that are difficult to disagree with are two of the more obvious forms of psychological resistance to disadvantage. This form of psychological resistance should not be underestimated by seeing it as merely a mode of survival or a way station on the way to protest. Defining the meaning of disadvantage for oneself is a refusal to be determined from without. Such psychological resistance is a clear opposition to disadvantage that is focused on determining one's psychology from within (the disadvantaged in-group). As we detail below, we believe that ample evidence of psychological resistance in studies that purport to show out-group favoritism is obscured by inattention to the meaning that the disadvantaged give to their intergroup stereotypes.

Interpreting egalitarianism as out-group favoritism. Among those who regularly conduct studies of group bias with the sort of arbitrary groups created in the minimal group paradigm (e.g., blues vs. greens; underestimators vs. overestimators), it is an open secret that a majority of participants evaluate the groups and distribute symbolic or material resources equally (Diehl, 1990). Thus, in arbitrary groups, an egalitarian lack of preference for the in-group is the norm despite the fact that a preference among a minority of group members routinely produces a small degree of in-group favoritism overall (for a review, see Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992). In the case of arbitrary groups, no one could or would interpret the absence of in-group favoritism as anything other than a preference for intergroup equality. However, when a similarly egalitarian lack of preference for the in-group is observed among the disadvantaged, it is routinely interpreted as if it

were an indication of out-group favoritism (Jost et al., 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This tendency is long-standing, as it goes all the way back to Clark and Clark's doll studies in the 1940s. Although the doll studies are typically presented as showing strong out-group favoritism because Black children overwhelmingly preferred White dolls, only weak to moderate out-group favoritism was typically observed in these studies. In fact, about 30–40% of Black children tended to prefer Black dolls (for a review, see Clark & Clark, 1947). In the more segregated Southern United States., where Blacks often constituted majorities in their local neighborhoods and schools, Black children showed closer to equal preference for Black and White dolls. As with the well-established finding of equal self-esteem among African Americans, Black children's near equal preference for Black and White dolls is somehow interpreted as an out-group favoritism that indicates the psychological damage of racism.

Interestingly, recent studies using indirect (or "implicit") methods tend to find that African Americans show little favoritism for Black over White images. Indeed, a quantitative synthesis using the Implicit Association Test (IAT) found African Americans to show only the slightest favoritism in their evaluations of Black over White faces, group labels, or names (Nosek et al., 2007). In similar studies, Dunham, Baron, and, here and throughout according to APA Banaji (2007) found Hispanic-American children to show no favoritism for their in-group over Whites. Olson, Crawford, and Devlin (2009) also used the IAT to examine out-group favoritism among gay men in the United Kingdom. They found only a slight preference for "same-sex" over "opposite-sex." And, Jost et al. (2002) found students at a lower-status university to show little favoritism toward their in-group relative to that shown toward a higher-status university using the IAT.

Despite the absence of out-group favoritism in these studies, most of these researchers interpreted minimal in-group favoritism as an indication of out-group favoritism because advantaged groups tend to show much stronger in-group favoritism than disadvantaged groups (but see Brandt, 2013; Olson et al., 2009; Rubin, Badaea, & Jetten, 2014). However, as in studies revealing equal self-esteem, equal preference for Black and White dolls, and minimal explicit in-group favoritism, there is little reason to presume that this apparent egalitarianism in implicit evaluation of in-group and out-group has a deleterious psychological meaning for the disadvantaged. Instead of interpreting the disadvantaged's relative lack of in-group favoritism as equivalent to the self-hatred of out-group favoritism, one could interpret the disadvantaged as relatively egalitarian in contrast to the extreme in-group favoritism displayed by the advantaged. In fact, this interpretation represents a more obvious and parsimonious option. It is unclear why the behavior of the advantaged is assumed to be the standard by which to judge the behavior of the disadvantaged and its psychological meaning for the disadvantaged.

Highlighting out-group advantage: more is less. More out-group favoritism by the disadvantaged is often less indicative of psychological detriment than is typically presumed. Even what appears to be clear out-group favoritism by the disadvantaged can have a psychological meaning more in line with psychological resistance than is commonly presumed, for at least three reasons.

First, the expression of out-group favoritism by the disadvantaged is constrained by the social reality of inequality in the context. Thus, objectively better performance by an advantaged out-group can place “reality constraints” on the in-group favoritism that the disadvantaged can reasonably claim (Spears et al., 2001). Indeed, in many studies of out-group favoritism, an experimental manipulation of group performance is conducted and advantaged and disadvantaged groups are asked to attribute characteristics related to this performance to each group. As a result, it is no surprise that Mullen et al.’s (1992) quantitative synthesis showed that in studies of experimentally created groups that include such manipulations, the disadvantaged show less in-group favoritism than the advantaged, especially on characteristics Mullen et al. thought to be related to the disadvantage. Experimental manipulations of inequality through seemingly objective, consensual, or otherwise legitimate performance feedback is likely to constrain the in-group favoritism of the disadvantaged in a way that real-world inequality may not. Further evidence that out-group favoritism is tempered by “reality constraints” comes from the more recent quantitative synthesis of Bettencourt et al. (2001). They found disadvantaged groups to show less in-group favoritism than advantaged groups in those areas that Bettencourt et al. (2001) defined as “relevant” to the out-group’s disadvantage. These results suggest that a clear material disadvantage constrains claims of in-group favoritism among the disadvantaged but facilitates them in the advantaged. However, the crucial caveat to this is that evaluations of out-group “superiority” do not in themselves reflect the internal (or internalized) legitimacy of out-group superiority (Spears et al., 2001; see also Jiménez-Moya, Spears, Rodríguez-Bailón, & de Lemus, 2015).

Second, closer attention to the presumably positive characteristics that the disadvantaged attribute to the advantaged reveal that they may not imply as much positivity as many psychologists presume. For example, in the study of sex stereotypes, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that women agree with men that men are much more “agentic” than women, whereas women are believed to be more “communal” than men. It is typically presumed a priori, and thus never assessed, that women view men’s agency as unambiguously positive and as indicative of why men are advantaged in power, status, and material wealth (for a review, see Leach, Bilali, & Pagliaro, 2015; Williams & Best, 1990). However, when women express the view that men are more agentic they are also characterizing men as more dominant, aggressive, violent, competitive, and concerned with power, status, and achievement (for reviews, see Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Williams & Best, 1990). Research by Rudman, Greenwald, and McGhee (2001) using the indirect

measure of the IAT also shows that women's attribution of power and status to men includes a great deal of negativity regarding its misuse in dominant or violent ways. Thus, a closer look at the greater agency attributed to men shows that it is a less flattering view than is commonly presumed. It should not be surprising that the disadvantaged can imbue a view of the advantaged as greater in power, status, competence, and achievement with critique. Rather than simply acquiescing to power and status, the disadvantaged have good reason to worry about its malevolent use to maintain their disadvantage.

Third, disadvantaged groups can acknowledge out-group advantage with the expressed purpose of highlighting and challenging the social value placed on this apparent "superiority" (Spears et al., 2001). In other words, apparent out-group favoritism by the disadvantaged may be a means of confirming disadvantage and highlighting its size and its illegitimacy. For example, the Clarks, and other social psychologists, used their "doll studies" to oppose U.S. racial segregation by arguing that this material disadvantage led to the psychological damage of self-hatred among African-American children. In Nosek et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis of IAT studies of in-group favoritism, women associated their group less with science and with careers, consistent with supposedly consensual stereotypes that establish men as better at science and more career-oriented. However, the psychological meaning of this apparent out-group favoritism for women is not so obvious. Associating science and career with men rather than women could also mean that women believe that sexual inequality in science and the workplace unfairly advantages men and disadvantages women. Similarly, van Knippenberg (1978) found that engineering students from low-status institutions saw their in-group as lower on the dimension of "status" than students from high-status institutions, and also evaluated "status" as being more important. Crucially, though, van Knippenberg interprets this as reflecting strategic concerns on the part of the low-status group to both highlight the difference in status, and to claim its illegitimacy. Thus, emphasizing an in-group's disadvantage—and the relevance of the comparative dimension—can signal psychological resistance to, rather than acceptance of, disadvantage.

Ingroup morality as a claim for in-group value: more is more. Sometimes, more claimed in-group favoritism by the disadvantaged is more psychologically important than is recognized. Evidence of in-group favoritism among the disadvantaged has often been explained away as "social creativity" or as limited to "alternative" or "irrelevant" dimensions. This dismisses the possibility that disadvantaged groups may genuinely value more highly those characteristics and resources that they are believed to possess (e.g., Derks et al., 2015; Mummendey & Schreiber, 1984; Simon, Glassner-Bayerl, & Stratenwerth, 1991). Thus, disadvantaged groups may show in-group favoritism on characteristics such as communality, warmth, and morality (e.g., fairness, cooperation,

trustworthiness) because they actually value these characteristics more than those typically attributed to advantaged out-groups (e.g., power, competence, agency, dominance, competition).

In contrast to the prevailing view that agency and achievement are most important to people, there is a great deal of evidence that moral characteristics are what people value most in themselves and in their in-groups (e.g., for reviews, see Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Leach et al., 2015). In fact, Leach, Ellemers, and Barreto (2007) showed that moral traits like honesty and trustworthiness were more strongly tied to individuals' identification with and positive evaluation of a wide variety of in-groups. Morality traits were more central to positive identification and to pride in the group than traits indicative of competence or warmth. In addition, the most comprehensive studies of in-group favoritism found moral traits to be the only traits that ethnic groups around the world attributed to themselves more than to out-groups (Levine & Campbell, 1972). Thus, the only seemingly universal basis for in-group favoritism is morality.

In addition to being central to positive group identification, morality is also central to having a positive reputation in society. Moral groups are groups that can be trusted. As a result, moral groups are seen as valuable groups, worthy of respect and of cooperation (for a review, see Leach et al., 2015). Interestingly, a growing body of work by Piff, Kraus, Keltner, and colleagues, shows that members of disadvantaged groups are, in fact, more moral (for a review, see Kraus & Stephens, 2012). Thus, their in-group favoritism in terms of morality appears to be based in social reality. Recent studies show the economically disadvantaged to behave more ethically and prosocially—cheating less, following the law more, and giving more generously than the economically advantaged. For these reasons, it is odd to interpret the disadvantaged claim to be more moral than the advantaged as a compensation for material disadvantage or a justification, rather than as an expression of in-group favoritism in terms of a highly valued and important human characteristic. In-group favoritism in terms of morality, or other characteristics important to people's positive self-evaluation, is probably best understood as a form of psychological resistance that contests disadvantage. As moral superiority is the most ubiquitous form of in-group favoritism around the world, it is not a "socially creative" strategy designed to compensate for lacking a more important characteristic such as agency or power. By interpreting the (moral) in-group favoritism of the disadvantaged as a sign of internalized oppression, the prevailing view appears to interpret a clear and common type of in-group favoritism as its opposite.

Conclusions and Implications

In this review, we have highlighted how the ambiguities in the psychological meaning of intergroup disadvantage allow psychologists to interpret any level of self-esteem, in-group favoritism, or out-group favoritism, as evidence of the

internalization of oppression. By assuming the psychological meaning that the disadvantaged give to their position, psychology runs the risk of imposing a psychology of oppression on the disadvantaged. Instead, we suggest that the psychological meaning of lower self-esteem, out-group favoritism, or in-group favoritism must be examined as being determined from within the disadvantaged group itself. From this perspective, much of the apparent evidence of the psychological detriments of intergroup disadvantage can be questioned. Indeed, we challenged the widespread assumption that attributing the "status-defining" characteristics of power, agency, and competence to the advantaged shows that the disadvantaged devalue themselves. As we showed, a great deal of research on self-esteem and out-group favoritism can be better understood as indicative of psychological resistance to disadvantage. When the disadvantaged show "out-group favoritism" by stereotyping the advantaged as agentic and powerful, they often appear to be critiquing the advantaged as exercising power in illegitimate and malevolent ways. And, when the disadvantaged show "in-group favoritism" on what are considered "alternative" domains such as morality and benevolence, they are not necessarily expressing "status-compensation" or "social creativity." Social reality-based claims of in-group favoritism that assert that the disadvantaged are more moral than the advantaged can be seen as psychological resistance to disadvantage.

While the theoretical importance of these issues is clear, a debate over the psychological meaning of disadvantage also raises important questions for policy and practice. As others have argued (e.g., Owusu-Bempah & Howitt, 1999), a preoccupation with the supposed psychological detriments of intergroup disadvantage risks channeling policy toward palliative support for the "damaged disadvantaged," in a manner that ultimately perpetuates their disadvantage. For example, Owusu-Bempah (1994) found that social workers' preoccupation with the supposed internalized inferiority of Black children in the United Kingdom led them to suggest radically different forms of intervention than was the case when the children in question were believed to be White. Their narratives regarding the needs of Black children focused on the need for remedial "identity work," portraying Black children in interracial friendships as suffering from a profound identity deficit. In contrast, White children in these friendships were viewed as well-balanced, prosocial, and caring. As an alternative to this "palliative" framework, our analysis instead suggests that a more fruitful, psychology-oriented response is to facilitate diversity in the value placed on different characteristics in society (e.g., by valuing moral power as much as cold competence), in a manner that: (1) maps on to group members' self-understanding, and (2) allows them to thrive as individuals and communities on their own terms.

Due to a preoccupation with the opposite poles of protest and acquiescence, psychology has attended less to the many and varied forms of psychological resistance to disadvantage that are achieved by self-determination of its psychological meaning. Of course, psychological resistance may ultimately serve

as a basis for direct action to reduce material disadvantage. However, that is not its only purpose or value. Because material disadvantage is the product of societal forces over which the disadvantaged have less control, it is unreasonable to expect the disadvantaged to focus all of their opposition on their material disadvantage. Refusing to internalize their position, and the attendant societal devaluation, is a more fundamental task (Gramsci, 1971). Indeed, what can be more important than the recognition of one's own value, especially when others refuse to recognize it (Fanon, 1967)?

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