ADVANCES IN GROUP PROCESSES

Edited by Shane R. Thye and Edward J. Lawler

ADVANCES IN GROUP PROCESSES

VOLUME 37

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ADVANCES IN GROUP PROCESSES VOLUME 37

ADVANCES IN GROUP PROCESSES

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PREFACE

Advances in Group Processes is a peer-reviewed annual volume that publishes theoretical analyses, reviews, and theory-based empirical chapters on group phenomena. The series adopts a broad conception of "group processes." This includes work on groups ranging from the very small to the very large, and on classic and contemporary topics such as status, power, trust, justice, conflict, social influence, heuristics, identity, decision-making, intergroup relations, and social networks. Previous contributors have included scholars from diverse fields including sociology, psychology, political science, economics, business, philosophy, computer science, mathematics, and organizational behavior.

Several years ago, we added an editorial board to the series to broaden the review process and draw upon the collective expertise of some of the top scholars in the discipline. That board consists of Jessica Collett, Joseph Dippong, Ashley Harrell, Karen Hegtvedt, Will Kalkhoff, Jennifer McLeer, Jeff Lucas, and Jane Sell. This group of scholars has made the series better and we are grateful for their service, guidance, and advice.

The volume opens with two chapters that address how social cognition impacts behavior. The first chapter asks if socially dominant groups are cognitively aware of the privileges they enjoy from group membership. Kaidi Wu and David Dunning review recent empirical work demonstrating and explaining how certain groups (white men) are prone to this phenomenon in "Hypocognition and the Invisibility of Social Privilege." This work shows that members of socially dominant groups have a harder time generating and remembering examples of discrimination faced by other groups. The chapter is an important conceptual step forward and provides clarification to the extant literature. Next, Lisa Troyer and Arwen H. DeCostanza review a vast amount of military research to understand "Group Dynamics in Disrupted Environments." This chapter nicely illustrates how the group processes literature informs research on how groups function in disrupted environments. It represents an important bridge between research in the group processes domain and that on military contexts and topics. We are pleased to have both chapters in the series.

The next chapter address issues related to one's reputation. Jane Sell, Katie Constantin, and Chantrey J. Murphy review how the concept of reputation has been used in sociology, organizational behavior, political science, psychology, and economics in "Reputation, Forgiveness, and Solving Problems of Cooperation." They examine the commonalities and differences across literatures, and then analyze how bad reputations may be repaired. Offered are formal definitions to synthesize these various notions. The chapter adds an original touch and much

clarification to the concept of reputation and will be a must read for scholars interested in its effects.

The next is a first of a kind in the Advances series. Reef Youngreen and Joseph Silcox analyze the concept of time in "Where did the Time Go?: Insights on the Meanings and Uses of Time in Sociological Social Psychology." These authors review research concepts involving time in psychology, sociology, and related fields. They assert that much research has failed to adequately incorporate time as a central concept, and they connect recent thinking about time to contemporary group processes research predominantly in the social identity tradition. The chapter offers a very creative and original look at how the notion of time can be better used, and we are proud to include it in this volume. Next, Seth Abrutyn and Omar Lizardo consider work in affective and cognitive neuroscience to better understand the range of human emotions and the self in "Grief, Care, and Play: Theorizing the Affective Roots of the Social Self." Using research from contemporary cognitive and neuroscience, they seek to broaden the kinds of emotionally related targets sociologist typically study. This work is anchored in the theory of affective systems, symbolic interactionism, and identity theory and will be an important chapter to those scholars working in those traditions.

The final block of chapters addresses theoretical and empirical issues related to identity theory. Brennan J. Miller and Will Kalkhoff examine the wide-ranging effects of identity nonverification in "Negotiating a Non-Verified Identity: Emotional, Cognitive, and Behavioral Responses." They present the results from a within-subjects experiment that persistently fails to verify the "student" identity among college student participants. They find that, contrary to predictions from the perceptual control model of identity theory, the effects of nonverification on negative emotion and behavior change is curvilinear, rather than the predicted linear effects. They conclude that too much nonverification produces a sharp rise in negative emotion and rejection of social feedback. This is an important chapter that suggests potential modifications to the modeling of identity nonverification.

Next, Barry Markovsky and Jake Frederick seek to locate the key definitions, assumptions, and semantic structure of Stryker's identity theory in "Identity Theory: Analysis and Reconstruction." Upon reviewing literature related to identity theory, they purport to find a number of existing gaps in the theory. Importantly, along the way they offer suggestions for improvement. Understanding that this chapter may draw attention and possible criticism from differing points of view, we decided to engage in yet another first for the series; we invited leading identity theorists to preview the chapter and then write a "comment" on it. That comment appears in "Getting Identity Theory (IT) Right" by Jan E. Stets, Peter J. Burke, Richard T. Serpe, and Robin Stryker. Barry Markovsky then replies to this comment in "Where is IT (Identity Theory)?" Our hope is that this vibrant exchange will further shed light on the semantic analysis of and empirical research on identity theory.

Shane R. Thye and Edward J. Lawler
Series and Volume Coeditors

HYPOCOGNITION AND THE INVISIBILITY OF SOCIAL PRIVILEGE

Kaidi Wu and David Dunning

ABSTRACT

Purpose – *Are members of socially dominant groups aware of the privileges they enjoy? We address this question by applying the notion of hypocognition to social privilege. Hypocognition is defined as lacking a rich cognitive or linguistic representation (i.e., a schema) of a concept in question. By social privilege, we refer to advantages that members of dominant social groups enjoy because of their group membership. We argue that such group members are hypocognitive of the privilege they enjoy. They have little cognitive representation of it. As a consequence, their social advantage is invisible to them.*

Approach – *We provide a narrative review of recent empirical work demonstrating and explaining this lack of expertise and knowledge in socially dominant groups (e.g., White People, men) about discrimination and disadvantage encountered by other groups (e.g., Black People, Asian Americans, women), relative what members of those other groups know.*

Findings – *This lack of expertise or knowledge is revealed by classic cognitive psychological measures. Relative to members of other groups, social dominant group members generate fewer examples of discrimination that other groups confront, remember fewer instances after being presented a list of them, and are slower to respond when classifying whether these examples are discriminatory.*

Social Implications – *These classic measures of cognitive expertise about social privilege predict social attitude differences between social groups, specifically whether people perceive the existence of social privilege as well as believe discrimination still exists in contemporary society. Hypocognition of social privilege also carries implications for informal interventions (e.g., acting "colorblind") that are popularly discussed.*

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HYPOCOGNITION AND THE INVISIBILITY OF SOCIAL PRIVILEGE

The United States faces ever-deepening social divides. A 2016 Pew Research Center report shows that a majority of Black People perceive racial discrimination in everyday living, but less than half of White People agree. Among White People, perception of anti-White bias has dramatically increased, along with a belief that ethnic minorities now enjoy racial privileges (Pew Research Center, 2016; Phillips & Lowery, 2018). Attitudinal chasms have widened not only along racial lines but also between genders. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, 41% of women state that men have easier lives than women, whereas only 28% men state similarly. Among those who support the opposite view that men these days have harder lives than women, men are strikingly three times more likely than women to say so (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Why do people from traditionally dominant social groups in the United States, such as men or White People, perceive there to be less discrimination aimed at subordinate groups relative to what subordinate group members believe? In contemporary terms, why do members of dominant social groups see less privilege in their lives than that perceived by subordinate groups? To be sure, discrimination and prejudice still exist in contemporary society, and is observable and measurable (Bleich et al., 2019; Blendon & Casey, 2019; McMurtry et al., 2019; SteelFisher et al., 2019), so why do people differ in their belief of its extent, or whether it exists at all?

In this chapter, we propose that dominant groups do not necessarily deny or actively "cloak" their privilege. Instead, we argue that such groups fail to acknowledge social privileges because those privileges are often invisible to those who have them. If people do not have to deal with discrimination on a day-to-day basis, they do not know that its absence is an advantage that they enjoy.

We argue that people from dominant social groups suffer from *hypocognition*, or the absence of a cognitive or conceptual representation, of social privilege (Wu & Dunning, 2018). They may have only a hazy impression surrounding the concept of their privilege, failing to have rich, detailed, and integrated knowledge of the disadvantages suffered by others. They fail to see privilege because they carry only an impoverished representation of the concept, relative to those for whom it is a visible fact of everyday life. They lack awareness or understanding of the scope, type, and frequency of prejudice that disadvantaged groups face in contemporary society and how those disadvantages tie together. They have only sparse historical knowledge of past discrimination and its consequences (Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2013). As such, they lack the cognitive architecture necessary to identify their privilege – they fail to recognize instances of someone else's disadvantage, to remember it, to recognize its significance, to acknowledge its prevalence and systemic nature, or to enter discussions of it.

We discuss *hypocognition* of privilege to account for asymmetries in perception of privilege and discrimination found across social groups and to explain why conversations across those groups often falter. We describe cognitive and social consequences of *hypocognition*. In addition, we ask if alleviating *hypocognition* can increase awareness of privilege and encourage recognition of the prevalence of discrimination. We end with a discussion on interventions that make visible the scope of discrimination experienced by subordinate social groups. At the same time, we caution against "privilege checking" and address situations in which confronting privilege can evoke identity-defensive motivations and backlash (Egan Brad, Spisz, & Tanega, 2018; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008).

To begin, we must define the terms of *social privilege* and *hypocognition*.

WHAT IS SOCIAL PRIVILEGE?

Social privilege is commonly defined as the rights or advantages that people of dominant social groups receive as a consequence of their group membership (Black & Stone, 2005). Although the concept of social privilege dates back to the nineteenth century, a resurgence of interest emerged in the 1980s among feminist scholarship. In her seminal work on White Privilege, women's studies scholar Peggy McIntosh (1989) likened privilege to an invisible knapsack of "special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks."

Key to our analysis, advantages related to one's social privilege are as much about the absence of everyday burdens as they are the presence of conveniences. Many advantages included in the invisible knapsack of White Privilege (McIntosh, 1989), for example, point to the lack of hassles White People have to worry about, such as *not* being followed when shopping and *not* being asked to speak for people of their race. This absence of inconveniences is a fundamental part of what makes privilege invisible, what dominant social groups fail to perceive, and what makes dominant groups hypocognitive of their advantaged circumstance. Although it is easy to appreciate the mosaic of diverse social worlds, it is far more difficult to traverse the landscapes of differing social categories and personally experience them. It is rare, if not impossible, to live life as both White and non-White, male and female, able and disabled, straight and gay, or right- and left-handed. Hence, dominant social groups do not readily recognize the advantage attached to not worrying about discrimination (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), inequality (Kraus, Rucker, & Richeson, 2017), harassment (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008), and poverty (Bullock, 1999) as an inherent aspect of their social privilege, because they do not frequently experience and cannot conceive of concrete instances of difficulties borne by subordinate group members. Those instances and their prevalence remain invisible to them.

There is another aspect of social life that makes such advantages invisible to the dominant group while making disadvantage observable to subordinate ones. The lives of people in dominant social groups are more salient in the mainstream culture. Their experiences are implicitly regarded as prototypical and normative (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Their lives are embedded in norms and attitudes that

are so pervasive that they become invisible. These folkways and experiences become like water so ubiquitous to the fish that the fish never notices it. Standing somewhat on the outside, people from subordinate groups are more acutely aware of the social conditions and life experiences of those from dominant groups than vice versa (Pratto, 1991).

WHAT IS HYPOCOGNITION?

We describe the absence of cognitive representation for one's social privilege as the *hypocognition* of social privilege (Wu & Dunning, 2018). The term *hypocognition* has a rich and vital history in anthropology and linguistics. It was originally coined by anthropologist Robert Levy (1973) to describe the phenomenon in which people lack the cognitive or linguistic representations of concepts to understand or interpret emotional experience. More specifically, Levy found that Tahitians explicitly described no grief when they suffered the pain and loss of their loved ones, because they are had no conception, or were hypocognitive, of the emotion. To be sure, they experienced some aspects of grief, but at a conscious level could not describe it completely or accurately. Instead, they only describe their emotion as feeling "sick" or "strange."

In cognitive psychological terms, *hypocognition* can be thought of as the absence of being *schematic* for a concept (Bartlett, 1932; Neisser, 1976). As classically defined, a schema is a well-established knowledge structure containing features representing a concept and associations with it (Barsalou, 1983). For example, most people have a schema of an apple, knowing that it is red, round, a fruit, edible, and sweet.

Schemata are the workhorses of competent cognitive function (Bartlett, 1932; Neisser, 1976). They allow people to make inferences and predictions about the objects, people, and events they encounter. Schemata direct attention and assist the absorption of new information. They aid memory, although they sometimes inspire false memory, distorting accounts of past events to better fit the schema (e.g., a green apple may be misremembered as being red). They aid conversation: Imagine an American talking baseball to a European or a European talking soccer back to the American. A chat would not go smoothly if one person had few associations to the ideas the other person expressed. A schema also includes elaborations on how a concept connects with other concepts. For example, to be schematic of the concept of depression is not only knowing the label of a mental disorder and its features but also being aware of people's attitudes toward mental illness or ideas associated with therapy (Alba & Hasher, 1983; Brewer & Treyens, 1981).

To be hypocognitive, or lacking schematicity, is to have an impoverished knowledge structure that contains only fragmentary aspects of a concept with few associations among its features. Although they may know their apples, most US Americans have little knowledge of a durian, a common fruit found in southeast Asia. Americans lack conceptual knowledge of its look, taste, smell, and use. They are not aware that the fruit is yellow with a spiky husk, has a sweet flavor and a creamy texture, and often provides a memorable and overpowering odor.

In fact, we suspect that many people have no idea that such a fruit exists. In our work, we find that when Americans are quizzed about the fruit, they have no network of associations needed to remember seeing it when presented or to discern it from other fruits (Wu & Dunning, 2019).

We extend the notion of *hypocognition* to examine it as a cognitive blind spot in why and how people fail to acknowledge their privilege and the discrimination experience of subordinate social groups. To them, the *hypocognition* of privilege is like the impoverished experience of a durian: When asked about the fruit, they have little conceptual knowledge of its features. Conversely, when given a list of a durian's features, they would not know that those features connect to describe a specific type of fruit.

As an illustration of this last point, consider the following objects: scissors, school desks, spiral notebooks, guns, can openers, guitars, and measuring tape. What category do these objects represent?

The answer is that they are all objects typically designed for right-handed people and which present problems for those left-handed. Left-handers frequently have to fumble with scissors meant to be used in their nondominant hand. They have to write on classroom desks designed for the comfort of right-handed individuals. Whereas this theme may be readily identifiable among left-handers, it is likely hypocognized among right-handers, who do not need to worry about finding tools designed for them in everyday living. In short, right-handers do not know the privilege that their handedness confers.

In our work, we have demonstrated that right-handers, indeed, have more impoverished conceptual knowledge for struggles faced by left-handers. When we asked people to list daily inconveniences left-handers experience, right-handers generated fewer instances than left-handers. This lack of conceptual knowledge for the hassles of the left-handed, in turn, explained right-handers' lack of acknowledgment of the privilege they have in the way that tools are designed, as well as the comparative burdens that left-handers face.

Hypocognition of Male Privilege

What about privileges conferred by membership in other social categories? In *The Macho Paradox* (2006), educator Jackson Katz described a classroom exercise during which he drew a line down the middle of a chalkboard and asked men and women to write down on each side of the board the steps they would take to prevent being a victim of assault. Whereas the instruction was followed by an awkward silence among men, women readily recounted safety precautions as a part of their daily routine (e.g., "holding my key as a potential weapon," "always carry a cell phone"), quickly filling up their side of the chalkboard.

Our data echo Katz' classroom demonstration and show that *hypocognition* underlies the invisibility of male privilege. We exposed men and women to a list of safety precaution items (adapted from Katz, 2006; Table 1). Afterward, we asked men and women to recall as many of the safety precautions on that list as they could. In the presentation phase, there were filler items (e.g., turn off the faucet when brushing teeth) interspersed with the safety items. In the recall phase,

Table 1. Safety Precaution Items from Katz (2006).

Own a big dog
Vary one's route home from work
Hold one's key as a potential weapon
Watch what one wears
Park in well lit areas
Guard one's drink
Share one's location with a trusted friend
Check the backseat before getting in one's car
Avoid getting on an elevator with a lone man or group of men
Have a male voice on one's answering machine
Avoid renting first-floor apartments
Book flights that arrive during the day
Pretend to be on the phone when walking home
Go out in groups
Be careful not to drink too much
Watch one's drink being poured
Share one's itinerary with family and friends
Lock car doors as soon as one gets in the car
Avoid wearing headphone when jogging
Meet first dates in public areas

the instruction did not explicitly mention "safety" items; rather, it asked participants to recall all items to the best of their ability. If men have a stronger conceptual grasp of male privilege in relation to the absence of inconveniences they have to carry (e.g., worry about self-protection against assault), they should be better able at recalling its associated instances. On the other hand, if men have poorer conceptual knowledge of safety precautions borne by women, they may only be able to see them as disparate pieces and show poorer memory of such precautions. Indeed, we found men recalled fewer safety precaution items compared to women. Note that men and women did not differ in their recall of filler items, suggesting that our finding of memory degradation among men (vs women) was due to *hypocognition*, not gender difference in memory ability.

Hypocognition of male privilege manifests not only through the lack of schematicity of self-protection against assault, but more broadly, through a lack of conceptual knowledge of everyday gender discrimination. When asked to freely generate instances of everyday discrimination instances women have to navigate (e.g., being catcalled, being told to smile by strangers on the street), men came up with fewer instances than women.

We further assessed how *hypocognition* of male privilege relates to opinions about male privilege and gender discrimination. We found that, overall, men were less aware of male privilege (e.g., "Men have it easier than women," adapted

from Pinterits, Poteat, & Spanierman, 2009) than women. *Hypocognition* (e.g., failure to recall safety precaution items or generate instances of gender discrimination) predicted this gender gap in awareness of male privilege. We also asked people to rate the extent of gender discrimination faced by men and women, respectively, from 1950s to 2010s (Norton & Sommers, 2011). Men, compared to women, perceived much less gender discrimination against women (vs men), especially in recent decades. This gender difference in perceived discrimination was accounted for by men's *hypocognition* of male privilege.

We have also measured *hypocognition* of male privilege via schematicity of beyond the topic of safety precautions (or lack thereof). In another study, we measured *hypocognition* via a free generation procedure in relation to gender discrimination more broadly. We asked men and women to generate as many daily hassles related to gender discrimination as they could think of. Replicating the previous study, we found that men were unable to generate as many gender discrimination instances (e.g., being explained things to them (that they are expert of) by a man; having doctors doubt or dismiss their pain) as women. This lack of schematicity (absence of inconveniences), again, predicted men's reduced perception of male privilege and gender discrimination.

Hypocognition of White Privilege

Much like handedness advantage and male privilege, *hypocognition* can underlie the invisibility of racial privilege. In a series of studies, we have found that White Americans are hypocognitive of White privilege, lacking the conceptual knowledge needed to identify, remember, generate, and react to instances of racial discrimination that their non-White counterparts have to navigate. White People lack a set of interconnected ideas representing a rich conceptual network that would help them remember, generate, or make judgments about the notion of privilege. For example, after being presented with a list of everyday instances of discrimination (e.g., being told jokes about the way they speak, being asked where they are really from), White People recalled fewer of the instances than Asian Americans in an unexpected memory recall task a few minutes later. In addition, when asked to freely generate instances of discrimination, White People came up with fewer examples.

White Americans also show signs of *hypocognition* relative to Black Americans when it comes to instances of racial discrimination as experienced by Black People. For example, White People were not able to generate as many examples of discrimination, relative to Black participants, when asked to list as many instances as they could. In another study, after being presented with a list of discriminatory behaviors (e.g., being suspected as loiterers at a coffee shop, calling the police for assistance but being suspected to be the criminal when the police arrive) and a few minutes later asked to recall as many behaviors as they could, White People recalled fewer of them than Black People.

If White Americans have less conceptual knowledge of what White privilege entails, it should come as no surprise that they are less aware of their privilege (Pratto & Stewart, 2012) and underperceive racial discrimination (Norton & Sommers,

2011). Indeed, our studies demonstrated that *hypocognition* among White People mediated group differences in acknowledging White privilege and perceiving the extent of discrimination faced by both Asian Americans and Black Americans. Specifically, White Peoples' lack of conceptual knowledge of the discrimination experience borne by non-White People predicted their lower awareness of White privilege and lower perception of racial discrimination, particularly in recent decades.

One caveat in interpreting evidence for *hypocognition* of social privilege is that we do *not* imply that members from socially dominant groups face no obstacles in life. We acknowledge that each group faces difficulties related to their social category, and that each group may have their respective blind spots of difficulties encountered by other group(s). For example, women may be unaware of certain struggles men face, such as the need to stay strong and hold back emotion. However, our studies highlight systemic manifestations of discrimination and absence of social privileges enjoyed by dominant group members. A 2019 Pew report shows 76% of Black Americans and Asian Americans report facing discrimination in the United States, a statistic that far exceeds that of White Americans. Ironically, many White Americans today fail to acknowledge their White privilege and claim to suffer from "reverse racism" (Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2018), despite that two-thirds of White People report never experiencing discrimination (Pew Research Center, 2019). Our studies demonstrate the cognitive process underlying dominant group members' *hypocognition* of privilege and link such *hypocognition* to gaps in discrimination attitudes.

WHY DOMINANT GROUPS ARE HYPOCOGNITIVE OF THEIR PRIVILEGE

Several psychological dynamics conspire to make social advantage invisible and the people who enjoy them hypocognitive to those advantages. If one does not have to face discrimination in one's own life, one can remain blissfully unaware of that discrimination and its prevalence. People cannot be expected to be expert in that which they fail to experience – at least not as expert as those who frequently encounter those experiences.

Attention Is Given to Obstacles More Than Aids

People in general attend to the barriers that they have to overcome more than the blessings they enjoy. In other words, headwinds are more salient than tailwinds (Davidai & Gilovich, 2016). This headwind/tailwind asymmetry has been documented in various contexts: Democrats and Republicans both see the electoral map working more against them than for them; academics think they face more hurdles than their colleagues in other subdisciplines; people believe they have faced harsher parental treatment than their siblings.

Notably, it is not that people are merely self-serving. In a trivia contest, people actually remembered more difficulties stacked against them than their opponents