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CHAPTER 4

Social Structure and Personality

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Social structure and personality (SSP) research is concerned with the relationship between macro-social systems or processes and individual feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. It is considered a perspective or framework rather than a theoretical paradigm because it is not associated with general theoretical claims that transcend specific substantive problems. Rather, it provides a set of orienting principles that can be applied across diverse substantive areas. These principles direct our attention to the hierarchically organized processes through which macrostructures come to have relevance for the inner lives of individual persons and, in theory, the processes through which individual persons come to alter social systems.

Although the SSP name implies an exclusive focus on social structures, SSP research is concerned more broadly with social systems, sets of "persons and social positions or roles that possess both a culture and a social structure" (House, 1981, p. 542). Whereas House (1981) notes that social structure can be used to refer to "any or all aspects of social systems," he and other SSP researchers define social structure more precisely as "a persisting and bounded pattern of social relationships (or pattern of behavioral intention) among the units (persons or positions) in a social system" (House, 1981, p. 542, emphasis in the original). This definition encompasses features of the macro-social order such as the structure of the labor market and systems of social stratification as well as processes such as industrialization. In contrast, culture is used in SSP research to refer to "a set of cognitive and evaluative beliefs—beliefs about what is or what ought to be—that are shared by the members of a social system and transmitted to new members" (House, 1981, p. 542). The distinction between structure and culture is not always maintained in practice (a point we discuss in more detail later), but…

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it is nevertheless useful analytically to separate the effects of constraints that emanate from the societal infrastructure and those that depend on the internalization of values and ideals by societal members.

SSP researchers adopt a similarly broad conception of personality, as "stable and persisting psychological attributes" (House, 1981, p. 527), which encompasses a wide variety of psychological dispositions as well as attitudes, emotional states, self-perceptions, and cognitive schemas. Although not considered personality as such, researchers within the SSP tradition have extended their interests to include behavioral outcomes such as educational attainment and crime (e.g., Hagan & Palloni, 1990; Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970), as well as other indicators of individual functioning such as health states and outcomes (Williams, 1990). Because of these extensions, some people refer to the field more generically as "social structure and the individual."

The SSP perspective conceives of the social world as a set of embedded circles, with the individual at the core surrounded by progressively larger and more complex social groupings, including dyads, small groups, communities, organizations and institutions, and finally the larger social system (see Figure 4-1).* In much the same way that one can peel away layers of an onion to reveal the inner core, SSP researchers attempt to trace the processes through which components of the social system influence individuals and through which individuals affect social systems. Although SSP studies rarely examine the linkages between every layer with equal care, they are distinguished by their simultaneous consideration of multiple hierarchically organized features of the social environment.

While the SSP framework promotes a holistic vision of social life, SSP studies typically focus on the relevance of specific features of a social system for its members. Thus, represented under the SSP rubric we find such diverse topics as the implications of work environments for personality and health (Kohn & Schooler, 1983), the intergenerational transmission of educational attainment (see Kerckhoff, 1995 for a review), and the relationship between racial inequality and racial attitudes (Bobo, Oliver, Johnson, & Valenzuela, 2000). As these illustrative examples suggest, most SSP studies take stratification as their starting point, adhering to

*This figure is based on McLeod's notes from a graduate course on social structure and personality taught by Jim House.
House's (1977) dictum to focus on social "phenomena or problems ... having some ultimate applied value" (pp. 172–173).

Described in this way, SSP seems indistinguishable from the broader sociological project concerned with the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Where SSP differs is in its commitment to incorporating psychological processes into sociological research, and its adherence to a set of specific methodological and theoretical principles for analyzing the relationship between macro and micro phenomena. We begin our chapter with a description and illustration of these principles. Then, because the success of SSP research depends on its ability to apply these principles in research practice, we review each principle in depth.

**KEY PRINCIPLES OF SSP RESEARCH**

Social structure and personality research can be traced back to Comte, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, each of whom was centrally concerned with the relationship between societies and individual psychology (see House, 1981 for a detailed review). Later studies in this tradition drew on anthropological, psychological, and psychiatric insights to posit national differences in personality characteristics derived from differences in child-rearing practices (e.g., Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Gorer, 1943). The framework came into its own, however, in the work of Inkeles and his colleagues on modernization and modernity (Inkeles, 1969; Inkeles & Smith, 1974). They used survey data from six developing counties to investigate the convergence hypothesis—"that the standardized institutional environments of modern society induce standard patterns of response, despite the countervailing randomizing effects of persisting traditional patterns of culture" (1960, p. 1). Inkeles argued that the new structures of industrializing societies become incorporated into the self-systems of their members through an implicit learning process whereby men begin to see the world in a new way. Inkeles's empirical analyses documented mean differences in psychological modernity* between societies that were substantially explained by differences in education, factory experience, mass media exposure, urban residence, and possession of consumer goods. Research on modernization remains vibrant (see, e.g., Inglehart & Baker, 2000), if controversial—a testament to the strength of Inkeles's approach.

Inkeles believed that sociological analysis was impossible in the absence of systematic and explicit attention to psychological processes (Inkeles, 1959). However, despite his efforts to create a coherent field of research based on that claim, SSP research floundered in the years that followed, fragmented by both the increasing substantive specialization within sociology and sociologists' long-standing resistance to psychological theories. In response to both of these challenges, House (1981) presented a conceptualization of social structure and personality research that focused on the analytic commonalities of diverse substantive projects, and called for the integration of sociological and psychological social psychology.

Drawing on Inkeles's work, House advanced three theoretical and methodological principles that guide SSP research. The first, the components principle, stipulates that researchers identify the specific components of the social system that are most relevant to understanding the phenomenon of interest. The second, the proximity principle, directs our attention to the proximate social experiences through which macro-social structures impinge on individual lives, in particular, micro-interactions and small-group processes. The third, the psychological principle, demands a thorough understanding of individual psychology so as to

*Modernity was defined as a cluster of psychological attributes including openness to new experience, the assertion of independence from traditional authorities, belief in the efficacy of science and medicine, and ambition.
allow a more precise accounting of the specific mechanisms through which macro-social structures and proximal experiences are processed and incorporated by individuals. House's three principles remain the most coherent and influential statement of the SSP framework to date.

Perhaps more than any other program of research, Kohn and Schooler's (1983) research on work and personality illustrates these principles. In a series of projects extending over almost two decades, Kohn, Schooler, and their colleagues have advanced the claim that occupational conditions importantly explain social structural differences in values, attitudes, and psychological well-being (e.g., Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Kohn & Smoliczynski, 1990; Naoi & Schooler, 1990). In adherence to the components principle, Kohn and colleagues distinguish two major dimensions of social structure—social stratification and social class. Social stratification refers to the hierarchical ordering within society based on power, privilege, and prestige, whereas social class refers to groups defined in terms of their relationship to the means of production and their control over the labor of others (Kohn, Naoi, Schoenbach, Schooler, & Smoliczynski, 1990). Kohn and colleagues identify occupational conditions, particularly opportunities to exercise self-direction on the job, as the primary explanation for the association of class and stratification with psychological functioning, thereby addressing the proximity principle. Finally, with respect to the psychological principle, they invoke a learning generalization process to account for the relationship between occupational self-direction and diverse aspects of psychological functioning (e.g., orientations to self and others, intellectual flexibility, well-being) in other areas of their lives. According to their findings, persons in higher status positions evidence greater intellectual flexibility, more self-confidence, more self-directedness, and less conservatism because their everyday occupational experiences demand those orientations.

As this example illustrates, the three principles of SSP research highlight potential linkages between sociological social psychology and the broader concerns of sociology and cognate disciplines. The components principle links SSP research with the long tradition of research and theorizing regarding the nature of social structure within sociology. The proximity principle focuses the SSP lens on the traditional concerns of symbolic interactionists, exchange theorists, and other researchers interested in networks and small groups. Finally, the psychological principle serves as a natural point of contact between sociological social psychologists and psychological social psychologists (Stryker, 1977), a contact that has recently been strengthened by developments in research on self and in social cognition (e.g., Hollander & Howard, 2000; Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990).

These linkages have proven more difficult to achieve in practice than in theory, in part, because of the way in which the SSP framework has traditionally been operationalized. With respect to linking with the broader discipline of sociology, the deterministic conceptualization of social structure that guides most SSP research is out of sync with recent theoretical developments within sociology regarding the relationship between structure and human agency. With respect to linking with other traditions within sociological social psychology, the reliance of SSP research on quantitative, survey-based techniques has limited its ability to operationalize the interactional processes that lie at the heart of other traditions. Finally, SSP researchers do not appear to have fully embraced theories from psychology and other disciplines concerned with individual functioning (e.g., psychiatry, medicine), perhaps because of continued concern about psychologization or because of organizational and institutional barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration.

We elaborate these points in our review of the three orienting principles of SSP research. We describe the basic tenets of each principle, the ways these principles have been applied in research, and their potential to encourage communication between social psychologists and
the broader discipline of sociology, and among the different "faces" of social psychology (House, 1977). Our review identifies gaps between each principle and research practice, as well as promising new directions for research.

THE COMPONENTS PRINCIPLE: SOCIAL STRUCTURE, CULTURE, AND AGENCY

The components principle directs researchers to identify those aspects of the social system that are most relevant to understanding the process of interest. In House's (1981) account, this requires a detailed description of the social structure, position, or system of interest, as well as an adjudication of the components of the social system that affect proximal social environments and individual responses most strongly. The same principle can be applied to the study of culture specifying, for example, which of the many differences between nations or groups account for cross-cultural variations in psychological functioning. The identification of relevant components can be driven by a priori theoretical decisions (as when researchers study the effects of a specific component of stratification, such as education, on individual functioning; Ross & Wu, 1995) or can be determined empirically (as in studies that evaluate the relative importance of income, education, occupational prestige, and other indicators of socioeconomic position for health; Williams & Collins, 1995).

SSP researchers conceive of social structure within a structuralist tradition, as an external, objective force that has a determinative influence over feelings and actions. More specifically, social structures are seen as shaping opportunities, which, in turn, constrain individual responses (Rubinstein, 2001). Kohn, Schooler, and their colleagues (e.g., Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Kohn et al., 1990), for example, argue that social stratification and social class determine opportunities for occupational self-direction and, thereby, values and intellectual functioning. Whereas structural symbolic interactionism emphasizes the limits that social structures place on possibilities for interaction (i.e., what persons are brought together in what settings) and on the situational definitions that can be invoked in interaction (Stryker, 1980), SSP adds a concern with the material resources and limits associated with different social structural positions, independent of individuals' perceptions (Fine's [1991] obdurate realities).

Within SSP research, social structure is most often operationalized with variables denoting individual positions within social hierarchies. Socioeconomic stratification, for example, is represented by income, education, and occupational prestige, racial stratification by individuals' self-reported (or sometimes attributed) primary racial identification, and gender by a variable indicating whether the participant is (or is seen as) biologically male or female. This approach can be criticized on two points. First, it ignores the relational nature of inequality, which depends on patterned distributions of power, resources, and privileges among sets of actors (Hollander & Howard, 2000). While there are exceptions to this criticism (e.g., studies of the individual implications of racial inequality: Bobo et al., 2000), SSP researchers do not typically incorporate power, domination, and oppression into their empirical analyses of system components. Second, variable-based operationalizations assume implicitly that persons who occupy equivalent status positions share common experiences, thereby forestalling analysis of individual resistance and change. Because lived experiences of domination and oppression vary among persons with equivalent status characteristics, status characteristics are meso-level proxies for macro-level structures.

Relatedly, systems of stratification depend on mutually reinforcing structures and ideologies that are not easily disentangled. Racial inequality, for example, has been conceptualized
as a system that subjugates some population groups to others based on the identification of presumed physical differences and the association of those differences with ideologies of inferiority and superiority (Anderson, 1990a; Feagin & Boohr Feagin, 1999; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). This system is manifested in myriad differences in the institutional, interactional, and psychological experiences of members of different racial and ethnic groups, all of which are interdependent. Whereas a traditional SSP analysis might choose a single component of racial inequality on which to focus, or might attempt to estimate the independent effects of multiple components, racial inequality may affect individuals in a holistic fashion that defies disaggregation (Bobo et al., 2000).

House (1981) identified two key dilemmas in SSP research that underly these comments: how to distinguish structure from culture, and how to incorporate human agency into explanations for the relationship between structure and individual outcomes. Recent theoretical developments within sociology suggest that these two dilemmas are linked, and have common origins in structuralist conceptions of social structure. In the remainder of this section, we review traditional SSP approaches to conceptualizing the distinction between culture and structure, and the relevance of human agency for the relations between macro and micro-phenomena. We then introduce more recent conceptualizations, and discuss the implications of these new conceptualizations for SSP research. In brief, we contend that these new conceptualizations create unique opportunities for linkages between SSP and other areas of sociology, including other traditions within social psychology. Moreover, SSP research could assist in the refinement of these conceptualizations if it were more explicitly oriented toward them.

The Distinction between Culture and Structure

SSP research maintains a long-standing conviction in the importance of distinguishing the structural and cultural origins of feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. The conceptual distinction between structure and culture can be traced back at least to the work of Marx and Weber whose relative emphasis on material and ideological interests has been the source of continuing discussion and debate (e.g., Alexander, 1984; Rubinstein, 2001). This distinction also served as a focal point of Inkeles’s research on modernization, and received substantial discussion in House’s (1981) review of the field.

Structural explanations emphasize current material conditions of life as they constrain and enable action and thereby generate characteristic psychological and behavioral responses. In contrast, cultural explanations attribute persisting patterns of behavior to beliefs and values that are transmitted to members of the social system through socialization. In a stark example of the distinction between these approaches, the culture of poverty thesis ultimately attributes the intergenerational persistence of poverty to the socialization of poor children into maladaptive psychological and behavioral patterns that diminish their abilities to take advantage of opportunities that become available to them (e.g., Lewis, 1968). In contrast, structural explanations attribute the intergenerational persistence of poverty to the persistence of blocked opportunity structures in impoverished areas (e.g., Liebow, 1967). Both types of explanations see individual behavior and psychology as the product of constraining features of the social order, but they differ in the nature of the constraints that are presumed most relevant.

As suggested, the choice between cultural and structural origins is often cast as either-or; therefore, a central goal of analysts has been to determine which of these broad components of the social system has most influence over societal members. Even explanations that allow for the importance of both cultural and structural processes choose between one or the other as
the ultimate determinant. For example, Wilson (1987, 1991) offers a more nuanced understanding of ghetto life by attributing the marginal economic position of ghetto residents to both macro-economic conditions that block opportunities for legitimate, stable employment and the formation of a social milieu that fosters a collective sense of futility among ghetto residents. Although Wilson does acknowledge that futility can be conceived as a cultural value that is learned and shared, he ultimately attributes futility to socially structured lack of opportunity. *

Despite the analytic appeal of the structure–culture distinction, some sociological theorists question its utility (see Rubinstein, 2001 for a review). Noting that culture has a constraining, quasi-external nature similar to that of structure, some theorists merge their definitions, effectively asserting that the two cannot be distinguished either conceptually or empirically (e.g., Hays, 1994; Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergeson, & Kurzweil, 1984). In a slightly different argument, Rubinstein (2001) contends that culture, structure, and agency are mutually constitutive. In essence, he suggests that while each has an independent influence on action, each is also partially determined by the others and none holds a superior position of influence. 1

Although different, both arguments imply that it may be more difficult to distinguish cultural and structural effects in practice than in theory. In particular, Rubinstein's claim implies that it may be more fruitful to study how culture and structure relate to each other, and how both respond to human agency, rather than attempting to determine their relative primacy. These relationships are visible in high relief at the locus of decision-making and action, where individuals define their interests, identify alternative courses of action, experience emotions and desires, and respond. Rubinstein's emphasis on studies of decision-making echoes House's (1995) call for renewed attention to the nature of social action by SSP researchers (see Alexander & Wiley, 1981; and Shanahan, 2000). Analyses of decision-making and action have the potential to reveal how structure and culture become embedded in proximal environments and individual psyches, and how they shape choice and action, while also allowing for the possibility that actors have autonomy. To date, SSP researchers have shied away from these types of analyses, perhaps because of concerns that they underemphasize structura constraints

*Although different in substantive focus, cross-cultural research within social psychology also attempts to distinguish the structural and cultural processes that shape individual psychology. In a recent extension of Inkeles and Smith's (1974) work, Inglehart and Baker (2000) use data from three waves of the World Values Survey to test two opposing hypotheses: that values converge as a result of modernization, and that traditional values persist in the face of economic and political change. They conclude that both processes occur. Values change in marked and predictable ways with industrialization and the later shift to a postindustrial economy. At the same time, distinctive cultural traditions (operationalized as Protestant, Orthodox, Islamic, and Confucian) persist even in the face of economic change. In sum, "(e)conomic development tends to push societies in a common direction, but rather than converging, they seem to move on parallel trajectories shaped by their cultural heritage" (p. 49). Inglehart and Baker's attempt to measure culture directly contrasts with most studies of cross-cultural variation in attitudes or other psychological dispositions that use nation-states as proxies for culture, leaving the specific cultural elements that distinguish nations underspecified (see Miller-Llorenzi, 1995 for a review).

1For example, Rubinstein contends that culture guides actors' identification of the opportunities available to them (e.g., racial intermarriage is not a realistic option for members of the Ku Klux Klan) and shapes judgments about the utility of pursuing alternative options. Actors are creative when interpreting culture, and can reappropriate culture to new ends (as in Sewell's [1992] transposition of schema), but culture is not infinitely malleable. Structures constrain the cultural interpretations that actors can apply and thereby limit strategic innovation. Moreover, shared values and beliefs define what is seen as desirable and useful, but do not serve strictly utilitarian ends. Schooler (1994) contends that there is a lag between psychological change, structural change, and cultural change such that psychological-level phenomena change more quickly than social structures, which, in turn, change more quickly than culture. This cultural "time lag" creates discrepancies among cultural values, social structural imperatives, and the desires of individuals. Schooler has more faith than Rubinstein that these discrepancies will ultimately be resolved through cultural and structural change, but his basic notion of cultural lag conforms to Rubinstein's interpretation.
(Kohn, 1989) and overemphasize culture (House, 1995). While recognizing these risks, we suggest that they have two related strengths. First, they remedy SSP’s overly deterministic conceptualization of structure without denying its centrality to human action. Second, they serve as a means to explore the effects of micro-experiences on macro-structures—a long-neglected part of the SSP agenda. We elaborate these points in a discussion of the ways in which human agency has been incorporated into previous SSP research.

**Human Agency**

The question of how to conceptualize and operationalize the role of action, choice, and agency in the face of structural and cultural constraints has received substantial attention from sociological theorists (e.g., Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Giddens, 1976; Sewell, 1992). While this is a question that applies across diverse areas of sociology, it begs close attention from SSP researchers because of their desire to make specific claims about the effects of structures on individuals, and of individuals on structures. Two common SSP approaches to addressing this question are the analysis of selection effects and studies of the role of agency in the life course. Both approaches highlight the influence of individual traits or actions on the proximal environments that people occupy. SSP researchers have also considered the more general question of the reciprocal relations between micro- and macro-phenomena, particularly in analyses of social movements. These analyses bring SSP research more in line with developments in sociological theory regarding the dynamic, dualistic nature of social structure.

**Selection Effects.** Relationships between social structural conditions and individual outcomes may reflect the effects of structural conditions on individuals, but may also result from nonrandom selection of individuals into those conditions. A classic example in medical sociology is the relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and mental health. Whereas low SES is associated with life conditions that diminish mental health, mental health problems may also impede socioeconomic attainment. Thus, observed associations between SES and mental health may reflect either social causation or social selection (Miech, Caspi, Moffitt, Wright, & Silva, 1999; Wheaton, 1978).

Analyses of selection effects rely on longitudinal data or instrumental variable techniques to discern the relative strength of the competing processes. Selection processes may occur as a result of conscious decisions on the part of the individual (e.g., a person with severe depression seeks a job with lower demands), but also through unconscious person-environment adaptations (e.g., as when persons with severe depression and their employers gradually adjust work performance expectations) and the actions of others (e.g., a person with severe depression is fired for failing to meet job expectations). Thus, selection effects incorporate both more and less than is implied by the concept of human agency.

**The Life Course.** The life course paradigm offers an alternative conceptualization of the role of human agency in social life that incorporates the possibility of selection effects but adds to that an analysis of individual propensities, behaviors, and actions that propel and sustain life course development. In Elder’s (1997) words, “(p)eople bring a life history of personal experiences and dispositions to each transition, interpret the new circumstances in terms of this history, and work out lines of adaptation that can fundamentally alter the life course” (p. 957). Thus, the life course paradigm emphasizes both the historical embeddedness of individual experience and individual contributions to life course construction. These
emphases are consistent with, but go beyond, the SSP paradigm as it is traditionally conceived (Elder, 1981).*

Empirical research validates the general claim that people select and create environments that shape their future life course. Assortative processes, in which people select situations that reinforce preexisting dispositions, have been observed in studies of behavioral continuities, attitudes, and personality (Alwin, Cohen, & Newcomb, 1991; Caspi & Herbener, 1990; Caspi, Bem, & Elder, 1989). People also make conscious decisions to change their lives in order to improve their conditions or to realize desired selves (Kiecolt & Mabry, 2000; Shanahan, 2000) within perceived constraints. This research demonstrates that assortative processes and motivated action merit empirical investigation in their own right, as important influences on the structure of individual lives, rather than as mere statistical nuisances (Thoits, 1995).

**Micro–Macro Effects.** Analyses of selection processes and life course development extend micro-effects into proximal environments, but do not offer an account of the processes that link interpersonal environments to macro-social structures. This additional step is essential if SSP research is to fulfill its stated mission to analyze the effects of individuals on social systems as complement to its analyses of the effects of social systems on individuals. The micro–macro link has been most fully elaborated by social movements researchers. They trace the effects of individual predispositions and actions on macro social change through analyses of the processes by which individuals become attracted and committed to social movements, and the subsequent influence of social movements on the larger social structure (see Snow & Oliver, 1995 for a review). Although the complete pathway of micro–macro influence cannot be established within any specific study, it can be constructed from the cumulative findings of research in this area.

Important for our purposes here, recent research in social movements highlights the reciprocal relations between psychological attributes (cognitions, affect, values, identities) and social movement participation (see Snow & Oliver, 1995, for a review). For example, drawing on classic SSP research on the relationship between social class and efficacy (e.g., Kohn, 1969, 1983), Sherkat and Blocker (1994) show that social class and gender differences in activist participation can be explained by differences in religiosity, personal efficacy, and parental socialization into protest activities (operationalyzed with parent’s own participation). Furthermore, even when controlling factors that predict protest movement participation, participation was associated with liberal political orientations, nontraditional religious orientations, later age at marriage, and selection into “new class” occupations (e.g., social worker, journalist, academic) seventeen years later (Sherkat & Blocker, 1997).

The notion that macro structures and individual actions are mutually relevant and reinforcing also appears in other areas of SSP research. For example, Bobo and colleagues (2000) propose that racial inequality, racial residential segregation, and negative intergroup attitudes are mutually constitutive.

The persistence of racial residential segregation deepens the overlap between economic disadvantage and race and ethnicity by serving to concentrate high rates of poverty and unemployment in communities of color. Racial residential segregation in turn, is reinforced by group identities and negative racial attitudes—which are made harder to transform in a positive way while groups remain economically unequal and residentially separated. Such conditions provide both the kernel of truth and the motivation to sustain mutual suspicion and hostility. (p. 31)

*Life course theorists also define the life course as a social structure itself by conceptualizing the life course as “age-graded life patterns embedded in social institutions and subject to historical change” (Elder & O’Rand, 1995, p. 453).
They provide support for their claim through analyses of survey and Census data from Los Angeles County. One study in their volume finds, for example, that despite substantial racial residential segregation, there are few racial and ethnic differences in housing expenditures, knowledge of housing costs, or housing tastes. Rather, preferences for integration with respect to specific other groups (e.g., White preferences for integration with Blacks) were most strongly predicted by negative stereotypes of those groups. Moreover, in contradiction to theories of prejudice, increased residential contact with Blacks diminished rather than increased White preferences for integration (Charles, 2000).

These efforts to elaborate the micro–macro interface are in accord with recent theoretical developments regarding the nature of social structure. For over two decades, Giddens (e.g., 1976, 1984), Alexander (1982, 1984), Bourdieu (1977), and Sewell (1992), among others have devoted substantial attention to the question of how to theorize social structure in a way that allows actors some autonomy. Whereas their specific arguments are quite different, they share a common underlying conceptualization of structure and agency as dualistic. “Structures shape people’s practices, but it is also people’s practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures” (Sewell, 1992, p. 4). In other words, social actors are constrained by the structures in which they are embedded, but they also reproduce those structures through their actions (as when people “do gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987) or “do difference” (West & Fenstermaker, 1995)). Moreover, within the constraints of their lives, actors can apply cultural schema and resources creatively to change structures (Callero, 1994).

This dualistic conceptualization of structure represents a more radical departure from the traditional SSP conceptualization than the claim that structures and individuals have reciprocal effects. Not surprisingly, then, empirical research that engages dualistic conceptualizations of structure (e.g., Burawoy, 1982; Pierce, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987) is conducted by scholars who would not identify with SSP and who, in fact, see their work as remedial to SSP’s determinism. Is there a place for SSP research in these developments? We believe that there is, if SSP researchers orient themselves more explicitly toward analyses of process in proximal environments, and broaden their empirical base to incorporate the insights of experimental and ethnographic research (House, 1995).

FROM MACRO TO MICRO AND IN BETWEEN: THE PROXIMITY PRINCIPLE

The proximity principle asserts that the effects of social structures, positions, and systems are transmitted to individuals through stimuli that impinge directly on the individual via, “the smaller structures and patterns of intimate interpersonal interaction or communication that constitute the proximate social experiences and stimuli in a person’s life” (House, 1981, p. 540). The proximity principle serves as the means by which SSP researchers trace the effects of macro-social experiences on individuals. It could, in theory, serve the same for analyses of the effects of micro-social experiences on macro-social structures but that possibility is rarely realized in practice. Because the proximity principle is concerned with the proximal experiences of individuals—the contexts in which individuals experience social structure—this component provides a natural link to other areas within sociological social psychology (e.g., symbolic interactionism, exchange theory).

The meso-structures and processes that are the focus of the proximity principle traverse multiple levels of social life, including everything from dyads to small groups to formal organizations. Each level encompasses multiple, multidimensional contexts that define the
settings in which macro-conditions derive tangible and symbolic reality for individuals.* We define contexts broadly as the locations defined by geography, function, and interpersonal relations in which tasks are accomplished and interpersonal exchanges occur. The importance of any particular context for individual functioning depends on its relationship to other contexts, both those that exist in a hierarchically superior position (as a community would to an individual family) and those with which it overlaps (such as work organizations and families). To date, SSP researchers have given much more attention to interactions between personal status characteristics and proximal environments when predicting individual outcomes (e.g., gender differences in the effects of substantive complexity on psychological functioning; Miller, Schooler, Kohn, & Miller, 1983) than to interactions across domains of life (such as between school experiences and relations with peers). In contrast, developmental psychologists emphasize the inherent contingencies in meso-level processes (e.g., families matter differently in different cultural and community contexts) and the need to move beyond linear, additive models (Boyce et al., 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 1979)—emphases that SSP researchers would do well to adopt.

Until recently, school, work, and family contexts have received the most sustained attention from SSP researchers. This focus is not surprising given the amount of time that individuals spend within these contexts, and the functions they perform for individual survival (Parsons & Smelser, 1956). Family, school, and work organizations are primary sites of socialization and value transmission for children and adults and are also the source of valued network ties. Accordingly, they have been invoked as relevant proximal environments in research on stratification and mobility (Kerckhoff, 1995), the intergenerational transmission of crime (Hagan & Palloni, 1990), and the effects of economic conditions on individual functioning (Elder, 1974; McLeod & Shanahan, 1993; Menaghan, 1991; Parcel & Menaghan, 1994).

Hearkening back to the concerns of early Chicago school sociology, neighborhoods and communities have become increasingly prominent in research on race and economic stratification in recent years. Following from Wilson’s (1987) and Massey and Denton’s (1993) analyses of racial residential segregation, analysts have charted the damaging effects of race-and class-based segregation on job outcomes, patterns of childbearing and marriage, and psychological well-being, among other outcomes (Anderson, 1990b; Connell & Halpern-Felsher, 1997; Crane, 1991; McLeod & Edwards, 1995). Neighborhoods represent a set of physical and environmental conditions, with implications for health and development, as well as social contexts that facilitate or impede social interactions of various types. For example, Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) conclude that the effects of neighborhood-level economic disadvantage and instability on violent crime are largely mediated by collective efficacy (social cohesion among neighbors). Many cities organize social services at the community or neighborhood level, giving neighborhoods added relevance as the sites at which resources are distributed.

Proximal contexts can be characterized by structures of interpersonal relations (which include social networks as well as roles, role partners, and role sets), as well as by the nature and content of context-based interpersonal interactions. Further consideration of each reveals potential linkages between SSP and other social psychological traditions. We emphasize symbolic interactionism and its offshoots here because it is strongest where SSP research is weakest, in particular, in its emphasis on proximal environments as contexts for day-to-day

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*We use the term context purposefully because it is broad enough to encompass both functionally specific domains (Parsons & Smelser, 1956) as well as historical epochs, geographically defined areas such as neighborhoods, and particular organizations. The important point here is that contexts are often embedded and mutually reinforcing.
interactions, its greater sensitivity to the social construction of diffuse status characteristics, and its recognition of human agency. However, similar possibilities for integration exist with respect to exchange theory.

The Structure of Interpersonal Relations

The two most common sociological approaches to conceptualizing the structure of interpersonal relations are as social networks or as social roles.

**Social Networks.** Social network conceptualizations emphasize the structural connections—the presence or absence of links—among individuals or groups. Common network concepts such as density (the degree of overlap among the links within a given domain), reciprocity (whether exchanges occur in both directions across a link), and multiplexity (whether a given link involves an exchange of more than one function or activity) further specify the nature of the connections among groups of individuals and the possible pathways for the exchange of information and resources. The concept of social support, particularly popular among health researchers, highlights the content of social networks and their provision of caring and instrumental assistance (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988; Turner & Turner, 1999).

Networks play an important role in social movements as conduits for information, resources, and affect, and as bridges between diverse individuals and groups (see Snow & Oliver, 1995 for a review). The bridging functions of social networks have also been used by stratification researchers to understand how individuals become linked to jobs both in the United States and abroad (Bian, 1997; Bian & Ang, 1997; Granovetter, 1973). Social networks constitute the structural basis for social capital, and serve as pathways for the transmission of values, attitudes, and behaviors (Alwin et al., 1991; Matsueda & Heimer, 1987; Newcomb, 1963; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). Homophily in social networks both reflects and reproduces social hierarchies (Bobo, Johnson, & Suh, 2000; Johnson, Farrell, & Stoloff, 2000) placing social networks at the center of research on social inequality. In short, networks are important to SSP research inasmuch as the structure and content of social networks may change in response to macro-structures and processes, and because networks serve as points of entrée through which macro-structures infiltrate individual lives (as in Katz & Lazarsfeld's 1955 study of the transmission of media reports to individual political attitudes through network-based opinion leaders).

**Social Roles.** Although the concept of role also implies links among individuals, it focuses on the social expectations associated with specific structural positions rather than on the presence or absence of interactional links between specific individuals. In its most traditional or structuralist form, a social role refers to the behavioral expectations that are associated with, and emerge from, identifiable positions in social structure (e.g., Merton, 1957). The role of mother, for example, carries with it normative expectations that shape role occupants' actions. As this example suggests, the traditional conceptualization views social roles as existing prior to specific interactions and serving as constraints on behavior.

This conceptualization of roles has motivated SSP research on structurally based variation in role occupancy and role expectations as determinants of individual functioning. Role allocation, or the availability of roles to different societal members, has structural origins as well as psychological effects, giving it central relevance as a mediational process in
SSP research. Drawing on traditional sociological interests in the fit (or lack thereof) between structural requirements and individual personality (e.g., Marx's alienation, Durkheim's anomie), SSP researchers have studied the implications of role incongruity, role conflict, and role overload for physical and mental health and for deviant behavior (Merton, 1957;Thoits, 1983). There is also a well-established literature on multiple role occupancy and well-being that tests the competing hypotheses that multiple roles offer greater potential for self-actualization (Linville, 1987) and that multiple roles create tension and stress (Thoits, 1983), with recent research suggesting that their effects are contingent on role quality and role salience (Hyde, Delamater, & Durik, 2001; Hyde, Delamater, & Hewitt, 1998). However, beyond these specific lines of research, role theory is not commonly invoked within SSP.

Traditional role theory has been repeatedly criticized for its lack of attention to individual agency. In response, several attempts have been made to revitalize our understanding of role and, therefore, role theory through the introduction of interactionist principles. The first of these theoretical innovations shifted the conceptualization of role-based human behavior from role-playing to role-making (Stryker & Statham, 1985; Turner, 1962). The concept of role-making emphasizes situational dynamics, bargaining, and personal control in role-based behavior. In essence, the interactionist conceptualization views individuals as creative negotiators of role expectations within specific interactions. More recently, Callero (1994) extended this argument further by introducing the notion of role-using, which begins from the premise that roles are not bundles of rights and obligations but cultural objects that serve as resources in interaction.

The unique contribution of Callero's conceptualization is his contention (borrowed from Baker & Faulkner, 1991) that roles do not have a preexisting reality but, rather, become real as they are enacted in the context of specific interactions. At the same time, roles have independent symbolic and cognitive realities, named variously "typifications" (Hewitt, 1991; Schutz, 1970) or "gestalts" (Turner, 1978) that transcend specific pragmatic applications. These symbolic realities involve generalized images of what it means to hold specific role positions that can be used by individuals as identity claims (as when a woman asserts her identity as a mother) but also to claim resources (e.g., assistance with child rearing) and to understand behaviors or feelings (e.g., men can invoke the role of mother to explain their nurturing behaviors even if they cannot claim the role). Roles as cultural objects shape cognition (motherhood implies a certain perspective or orientation to the social world) and influence behavior, although in a negotiated rather than deterministic way.

The astructural conceptualization of role that Callero (1994) offers is not easily reconciled with the structuralist biases of SSP research. They nevertheless find common ground in questions about the processes through which roles are claimed and the consequences of role claims for interactions within specific settings. As Callero notes, roles are not uniformly available as identity claims. Men cannot claim the role of mother, and most of us will never have access to the role of U.S. senator (although the role of U.S. senator is available as a cultural object to understand the political system). Beyond Heiss's (1981) discussion of the effects of socialization and prior interactions on consensus vs. dissensus of role definitions, however, the structural bases for the success and failure of role claims have received relatively little empirical attention. This disconnect suggests one potential area of convergence between SSP researchers and interactionist role theory, especially in light of the early theoretical discussions of status inconsistency that address the interaction of diffuse status characteristics, such as race and gender, and particular role-identities (Hughes, 1945). The distinction between
role-based self-identifications, pragmatic role enactment, and roles as cultural objects would also help SSP researchers better specify the components of the social system that are most consequential for individual functioning.*

On a more general level, the roles-as-resources perspective would allow SSP researchers to address better the interrelations of culture, structure, and agency (Rubinstein, 2001). By acknowledging the cultural component of roles, new approaches to role theory invite inquiry into the relationships among social structural positions, behavioral expectations, and broader cultural trends, as well as the links between structured roles and culturally based prestige, status, and power. In addition, if we accept the notion that roles are resources that can be used for action, they offer one avenue through which to address processes of social change and the responsiveness of social structure to individual agency.

Interpersonal Processes

SSP researchers often invoke socialization as an explanation for the effects of social positions on feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. Socialization-based explanations appear in research on gender (Beutel & Marini, 1995), child development (Corsaro & Eder, 1995), work and occupations (Kohn & Schooler, 1983), deviance (Krohn, 1999; Matsueda, 1988), and, somewhat less commonly, social movements (Snow & Oliver, 1995). These explanations resonate with the early traditions of SSP research and remain very popular in contemporary research. Despite the availability of careful research on socialization processes (see Corsaro & Eder, 1995, for a review), however, socialization is often treated as a fall-back explanation in SSP research—something that explains whatever cannot be explained by other mechanisms.

The nature and quality of interpersonal interactions within (and across) domains have also been implicated in the relations between social systems and individuals. For example, numerous studies demonstrate the mediating role of marital relations, parent–child interactions, and the development of trust between neighbors in the relationship between economic deprivation and individual well-being (e.g., Conger et al., 1992; Elder, 1999; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Work conditions shape interpersonal interactions in the workplace (Hochschild, 1983; Lively, 2001) but also at home (Menaghan, 1991). In sum, socially structured conditions influence interactions with intimates (as evidenced in the association of social support with gender and class; Turner & Marino, 1994), as well as with strangers (as evidenced in mundane acts of racism; Feagin, 1991). These interactions, in turn, affect attitudes, feelings, and behaviors (e.g., House et al., 1988; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000), often reinforcing the social order from which they are derived.

Whereas SSP researchers have been reasonably successful at identifying the interactional correlates of social structural positions, they have been less successful at analyzing the processes that account for them. Research in the symbolic interactionist and status characteristics traditions complements SSP research by focusing specifically on those processes, each

*Whereas this approach could be usefully applied to organizational roles, its benefits are perhaps most clear in the case of diffuse status characteristics such as race and gender. By considering the independent and interactive contributions of structural position (e.g., power, status) and cultural understandings, SSP researchers would be better able to move away from variable-oriented analyses toward more dynamic, contextual conceptualizations and, thereby, to converse with research on gender and race conducted within other social psychological (and feminist) traditions.
with a unique emphasis. Recent interactionist studies on emotional labor performed by service workers (Hochschild, 1983) and on more general face-to-face interactions (Maynard, 1991; West & Fenstermaker, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987), link the interactional patterns that exist within dyads, small groups, and formal organizations to larger social structures of race, class, and gender. West and Zimmerman (1987), for example, demonstrate that gender is both expressed and reproduced in interaction. Specifically, they find that men are more likely than women to begin conversations, to monopolize talk time, and to interrupt. West and Zimmerman contend that gendered behavioral expectations lead women to be more passive in interaction than men and that women, themselves, assist in the reproduction of gendered stereotypes and male dominance through their passivity. Similarly, researchers who study emotional labor have shown that female workers are more likely than men to engage in emotional labor, which further perpetuates the expectation that women are caretakers, as well as norms regarding the inappropriateness of female anger (Pierce, 1995). While these interactionist studies provide insightful accounts of the ways in which larger social structures affect individuals more proximally, they often lack the careful consideration given to the relative effects of culture and of structure deemed necessary by SSP researchers.

Status characteristics theory supplements those accounts with an explanation for how, and why, status structures that occur in socially heterogeneous groups often reflect the larger social structures within which they are embedded. Specifically, status characteristics theory proposes that status characteristics, when salient in the situation, create performance expectations in goal-oriented settings and these expectations, in turn, shape the actors’ behavior and rank in the power and prestige order (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Berger, Fiske, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Ridgeway & Walker, 1992; Webster & Foschi, 1988). Individuals with devalued statuses are less able than others to assume leadership roles and participate actively, and their contributions to the task are evaluated less positively. Even when diffuse status characteristics such as race and gender are not directly relevant to the task at hand, they become salient in mixed group settings (Ridgeway & Diekema, 1989; Ridgeway & Walker, 1992; Tannen, 1995).*

These theoretical traditions hold promise for SSP research because they offer accounts of the processes through which the larger social structure impinges upon interactional opportunity structures, normative expectations, and individual behaviors. The narrow scope of status characteristics theory (confined to task-oriented groups) limits the domains to which it can be applied directly, but its convergence with ethnographic analyses of the reproduction of hierarchy (Lively, 2000; Ollilainen, 2000; Pierce, 1995) implies a more general process that has relevance for interactions within other groups such as formal organizations and dyads. Each of these traditions, in turn, would benefit from a stronger linkage with SSP research. In particular, they, like most interactionist studies, assume the presence of structure (or structures) without having clearly explicated the nature of the structures or the specific components of the structures that impinge upon interactions. Gendered expectations, for example, could have their origins in cultural assumptions, the traditional distribution of roles by sex, or,

*Although Ridgeway and Walker (1992) offer status characteristics theory as an explanation for the reproduction of status hierarchies within small groups, they acknowledge that the reproduction is not perfect. Because people are complex packages of skills and status characteristics, the status structures people construct through interaction are aggregates: weighted averages of a sort. As a result, people may experience power and prestige hierarchies that "challenge their usual expectations for individuals with given diffuse status characteristics" (Ridgeway & Walker, 1992, p. 294). The imperfect relationship between societal stratification and group-based status structures suggests the potential for individuals to create expectations that result in individual-, group-, and societal-level change.
in some cases, biological distinctions that preclude role occupancy. Careful attention to the components of macro-structures, encouraged by the SSP framework, would allow scholars working within these traditions to develop more precise theories about the macro-structural origins of the group-based processes they observe.

In sum, adherence to the proximity principle requires attention to the range of life domains that are implicated as well as to their organization, content, and implied interactional processes. Because of its unique position as a link between macro and micro worlds, the proximity principle offers SSP researchers an opportunity to converse with other traditions in sociological social psychology, as well as to engage broader disciplinary debates about the relative importance of structure and agency in human behavior. The potential insights from this type of integration are manifold, but it will require a willingness to move back and forth between the positivistically oriented large-scale quantitative analyses that have historically characterized SSP research and the case-based insights of experimental and ethnographic researchers (see Mueller, Muline, & Glass, 2002).

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

The psychological principle stipulates that we examine the psychological mechanisms through which proximal structures and processes affect individual attitudes, feelings, and behaviors. In other words, it is not enough to understand how macro-structures shape the proximal environments of individuals; we have to also understand how those environments become integrated into individual thoughts and actions. The expansion of the SSP perspective into health research implies a broadening of this principle, to incorporate an understanding of how proximal environments affect physiological functioning and "get under the skin" (Taylor, Repetti, & Seeman, 1997). Although efforts to bring psychology and biology into SSP studies are linked, they are not inseparable. The mechanisms that link some environmental characteristics (e.g., chronic stress) to physiology are psychologically mediated, but other environmental characteristics (e.g., environmental toxins) have effects that transcend cognition.

In an early statement of the relevance of personality for sociology, Inkeles (1959) argued that sociological analysis is incomplete without a general theory of personality. While most SSP researchers accept Inkeles's directive to explicitly analyze psychological processes, most have rejected the stringent assumptions implicit in general theories of personality or basic human needs. Rather, they posit specific psychological processes, such as social comparisons (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978) and identity-based processes (Stryker, 1980) that link features of proximal social environments to individual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. These processes focus on the ways in which proximal environments are perceived by, and come to have meaning for, individuals.

Despite the centrality of the psychological principle to the success of the SSP framework, it is the principle that is least often realized in practice. Many SSP analyses rely on naïve theories of psychological process, or assume the existence of hypothesized processes from the association of specific proximal conditions with individual outcomes. We urge greater attention to the work of psychologists by SSP researchers, both for the sake of improving SSP analyses and of creating greater integration between the two disciplines. In this section, we highlight two areas of research, both of which focus on meaning and perception, in which we see convergence between the concerns of sociologists and psychologists: social cognition and self. We then describe recent research on health that highlights the potential of interdisciplinary research on the links between macro-social structures and individual biology.
Social Cognition

Theories of social cognition represent one point of entrée into the question of meaning. Social cognition dominates the field of psychological social psychology, but has been virtually absent from SSP research.*

Social cognition refers to "structures of knowledge, the processes of knowledge creation, dissemination, and affirmation, the actual content of that knowledge, and how social forces shape each of these aspects of cognition" (Howard, 1995, p. 91). Cognitive structures, or schema, influence what we attend to, what we remember, and our inferences about others (Hollander & Howard, 2000). Studies of social cognition, therefore, focus on how information is organized and stored in memory, the processes that link information with social experience in memory, and how experience, in turn, alters the stored information (Morgan & Schwabke, 1990).

According to Howard (1994) cognitions are inherently social and context-dependent. Echoing dualistic conceptualizations of structure and agency, Howard claims that social structure and cognition are mutually constitutive. The categories that we use to store information, and the accessibility and salience of those categories to cognition, depend on both socially and culturally constructed boundaries and on the situational imperatives of the setting in which cognition occurs.

Focusing on the social nature of cognition highlights the potential contributions of social cognition research to the study of inequality—a topic clearly relevant to SSP researchers. Certain characteristics (e.g., gender) lend themselves to social differentiation and categorization, which reinforce group boundaries. Selective information processing (of which social categorization is one such example) leads persons to see out-group members are less differentiated than in-group members, a perceptual bias that favors more extreme evaluations of out-group members (Deschamps, 1983). More generally, social categories underpin processes of attribution, self-evaluation, and the like in ways that contribute to the legitimation of social hierarchies based on group level identities, or characteristics, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and the like (Della Fave, 1980). A focus on these types of processes when studying stratification would enhance our understanding of the psychological mechanisms through which stratified social orders come to have meaning for individuals, and shape social interactions so as to reify existing inequality.

Self

Theories of social cognition can also be used to merge sociological and psychological understandings of self. Self is a central concept in both sociology and psychology, although its specific conceptualizations and uses differ. Self and self-processes are often invoked by sociologists to explain the influence of proximal experiences on psychological well-being, for example, Rosenberg and Pearlin's use of reflected appraisal to link social class to self-esteem (also see Gecas and Seff's (1990) discussion of other self-processes to explain the specific effects of occupation and work conditions on self-esteem). These types of explanations are invoked increasingly in research on social movements as researchers attempt to discern the motivations, emotions, cognitions, and the like, that motivate individuals' entrance into,
participation in, and exit out of particular involvements (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2000; Granberg & Brown, 1989; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Sherkat & Blocker, 1994).

Although definitions of self vary even among sociologists, the concept of self is "often used generically to refer to all of the products or consequences" (Gecas & Burke, 1995, p. 42) of the reflexivity between self as subject and self as object. The most common operationalizations of self measure aspects of self-concept (i.e., self-esteem and self-efficacy) or of identities (linked to roles, memberships, categories, and character traits). Sociological conceptualizations of self emphasize the relationships among different components of self (as in identity hierarchies) and the embeddedness of self within social situations and structures, offering a natural linkage to the proximal environments that interest SSP researchers.*

Early work in psychology conceptualized self as an attributional system, operationalized with measures of self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund, 1972), self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974), and so on. More recent work, however, has developed a model of self as a cognitive system of self-schemas (or prototypes) that processes self-relevant information (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Markus, 1977; see Linville & Carlston, 1994, for a review). According to the latter, self determines which aspects of the social environment are taken into account, how they are interpreted, and how we respond (Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990).

Despite their differences, sociological and psychological conceptualizations of self share the beliefs that there are multiple selves (organized hierarchically around social roles, personal identities, or interactional contexts), that self-knowledge can be gained through social interaction as well as self-observation, and that self-motives (e.g., self-verification, self-enhancement, self-consistency) contribute to stability in self over time. Moreover, both are based on fundamentally cognitive models of human behavior, in which persons make attributions about the environment in order to organize and understand it. These commonalities suggest the possibility for interdisciplinary collaboration on questions of how proximal social structures shape self-relevant interactions and how those interactions become integrated into self-structures.

Sociologists' emphasis on the social structural and interactional origins of the self complements psychologists' more nuanced and comprehensive theoretical understanding of internal self-processes. Morgan & Schwalbe (1990) elaborate this complementarity in a discussion of the analogous concepts of role-based identities and self-schemas. Both refer to aspects of self-organization that facilitate processing of incoming social information. They differ in that role-based identities are defined as deriving from formally defined roles (e.g., parent, worker) whereas self-schemas are more often defined in terms of individual traits (e.g., hard-working vs. lazy). Linking these two concepts theoretically would yield benefits for both psychology and sociology. Schema-based models of self could be used to extend sociological theories regarding the implications of the self for behavior by specifying the processes through which the self shapes attential processes, and through which environmental experiences are integrated into self-knowledge and guide behavior. In complement, sociological theories of role-based identities have the potential to reveal the origins of self-schema in status hierarchies, social networks, and other socially patterned interactions.

As a specific example of the convergence of these approaches, we consider the concept of identity salience. Identity theory contends that role-based identities are organized hierarchically according to their commitment and salience. The underlying proposition is that identities

*This conceptualization of self derives from Stryker's theory of Structural Symbolic Interaction (1980). To the degree that sociologists view self as a reflection of a differentiated society, they also view the self as differentiated.

Although most symbolic interactionists would argue that there is no "real" self, or that there are as many selves as there are roles, or role partners, structural symbolic interactionists argue that the stability we typically encounter in self is attributable to individuals' patterned involvement with social networks and their positions within the existing social structure.
to which individuals are more committed (either affectively or by virtue of social network structure) are more salient (i.e., more likely to be invoked) and have greater influence on behavior (see Chapter 2 in this volume for a more complete discussion). The question that remains is: *How and why* does identity salience influence behavior? Self-schema theories provide precise models for the processing of self-relevant information that could help answer this question. According to these models, information that pertains to self-domains that are well-developed (i.e., schematized) receives greater attention and is assimilated into existing cognitive structures more rapidly than information that pertains to self-domains that are less well-schematized. Furthermore, information that is accessible to memory has a stronger effect on behavior than information that is not. Based on those findings, one might hypothesize that salient identities have stronger effects on behaviors because they facilitate the ease and rapidity with which individuals process self-relevant information.

Whereas several theorists have argued convincingly for the integration of sociological and psychological theories of self and identity (Alexander & Wiley, 1981; Morgan & Schwalbe, 1990; Stryker, 1983; Stryker & Burke, 2000), integration at the empirical level is less well-developed. Promising areas of interdisciplinary collaboration include studies of the self in social movements (Stryker, Owens, & White, 2000) and of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). With respect to the former, psychological and sociological social psychologists move easily within each other's literatures, and have developed convergent explanations for the effect of consistency between self-views and movement identities on movement participation (see, e.g., Pinel & Swann, 2000 on the links between identity theory and self-verification theory). With respect to the latter, psychologists have begun to incorporate social networks into their theories of how group-based identities are developed and how they influence behavior (e.g., Deaux & Martin, 2001), borrowing from identity theory. These "collaborations" demonstrate the increased sensitivity of each discipline to the insights of the other, but rarely involve the development of common research agendas. The organizational, disciplinary, and methodological barriers to interdisciplinary research remain substantial impediments to truly interdisciplinary research (Stryker, 1983).

**Biology**

The promise of interdisciplinary collaboration between the social, behavioral, and biological sciences can be seen in the active project concerning the effects of socioeconomic status and race on health. Drawing on perspectives from stress research (Pearlin, 1999), and using SSP as an organizing framework, researchers interested in the effects of stratification on health have developed comprehensive conceptual models that trace the effects of macro-structures on individuals through intervening experiences in proximal environments (e.g., families, social networks, communities) and, importantly, through the relevance of those proximal environments for physiological functioning. Although the hypothesized linkages have not all been established empirically, early results are encouraging.

In one specific example of this type of model, Williams and Williams-Morris (2000) trace the effect of racism on individual health through the mediating experiences of low socioeconomic status, discrimination, and ego identities. As the authors note, racism is a system that involves an ideology of inferiority accompanied by individual-level prejudice and discrimination. Moreover, racism is not independent of other social institutions but, rather, transforms those institutions so that the entire social system becomes racialized. Racism becomes relevant for individual health through multiple pathways including: (1) the effects of discrimination, blocked opportunities, and social isolation on the socioeconomic attainment
of racial minority groups, (2) residential segregation of minority groups in economically deprived neighborhoods, (3) individual experiences of discrimination, and (4) the internalization of stigma and racial inferiority. Furthermore, these studies have found that discrimination influences cardiovascular reactivity and blood pressure, suggesting one mechanism by which macro-environments get “under the skin” of individuals.

In a similar vein, Taylor, Repetti, and Seeman (1997) review research demonstrating links between environmental experiences, stress, and physiological responses, which suggests that chronically challenged physiological systems experience cumulative damage (a build-up of allostatic load) with implications for physical functioning. For example, persistently conflictual marital interactions are associated with greater cardiovascular and neuroendocrine reactivity and lower immune function (Kiecolt-Glaser, Malarkey, Cacioppo, & Glaser, 1994). Moreover, drawing the connection between mind and body, research suggests that negative emotions suppress immune function and may increase risk of heart attacks because of activation of the sympathetic-adrenal-medullary system (see Taylor et al., 1997, for a review of relevant research). While neither of these approaches has been entirely successful at tracing the full set of linkages from the macro-environment to individual outcomes, both suggest the promise of interdisciplinary collaboration in research on social location, personality, behavior, and health.

Even as progress is made in this regard, there remain undertow currents of dissatisfaction among sociologists, who often feel that their contributions are overlooked or devalued by researchers from other disciplines. Schwartz (1999), for example, claims that sociological theories of mental illness are often deemphasized in favor of psychology and biology, an observation that echoes Kohn’s (1989) concern about the increasing psychologization within social psychology. Sociological stress researchers have also decried the shift in emphasis away from the structural origins of stress to the processes through which stress comes to have psychological relevance for individual behavior and outcomes (Pearlin, 1989).

Although we are sympathetic to these arguments, we are less concerned than our colleagues about the future of sociology in these types of projects, particularly given that psychologists and health researchers, alike, have become more, rather than less, aware of the importance of social context in the last twenty years (Deaux, 2000; Ryff, 1987; Taylor et al., 1997). While there is always the danger that psychologists will psychologize social processes, that danger has not yet been fully realized. Moreover, linking the project of sociological relevance exclusively to the identification of macro-origins of individual outcomes cedes little of social life to sociology, and minimizes the importance of proximal social interactions as meso-level instantiations of macro-structures.

**CONCLUSION**

As we describe it here, SSP is a perspective of paradoxes. Seemingly central to sociological interest in the macro–micro link (e.g., Alexander, Geisen, Münch, & Smelser, 1987; Huber, 1990), it is not a key contributor to those developments and is often explicitly cited as irrelevant (Hollander & Howard, 2000). Whereas SSP is the social psychological paradigm that best explicates the need for simultaneous consideration of multiple levels of social life, the most innovative multilevel research is being conducted by persons who do not explicitly pledge allegiance to the SSP paradigm. Finally, although SSP is now routinely accepted as one of the three faces of social psychology (House, 1977), it is virtually invisible in sociological social psychology textbooks (with the notable exception of Michener & Delamater, 1999) and in *Social Psychology Quarterly*, the flagship journal of the discipline.
As Kohn (1989) notes, SSP is a "quintessentially sociological" project. What distinguishes the SSP approach from the more general disciplinary project of macro–micro linkage is its adherence to its three orienting principles. Among extant approaches to macro–micro analysis, SSP offers the most explicit prescription for research, demanding careful attention to the structure and content of social relations and social processes at multiple levels of analysis. However, whereas the SSP framework provides scholars with a useful orientation to analyzing macro–micro relations it does not, in and of itself, offer a specific explanation for how and why those relations exist. As a result, SSP researchers rely on theories and research from other theoretical traditions within sociology and psychology, some of whose basic assumptions conflict with those of the SSP framework. This conflict is particularly evident in the increasing complexity and nuance in sociologists' conceptions of social structure, culture, and human agency as they contrast with the more deterministic conceptions of social structure in SSP research.

SSP is an inherently integrative framework. It brings together the contributions of structural sociologists, sociologists of culture, and social psychologists within both sociology and psychology. This integration cannot be accomplished within a single study but, rather, depends on the cumulative development of knowledge within specific substantive areas. By implication, contributions to SSP may come from people who do not explicitly identify as adherents to the tradition as well as from those who do. SSP researchers build on those contributions to develop models of social life that attend simultaneously to multiple levels of analysis.

The successful realization of SSP depends on our abilities to work with other disciplines concerned with psychological and biological processes, such as psychology, neurobiology, medicine, and public health. Without precise models of the mechanisms by which proximal environments influence individual thoughts and actions, the SSP framework cannot achieve the disciplinary integration to which it aspires. These collaborations depend, in turn, on finding points of intellectual convergence and identifying organizational forms and funding mechanisms that permit such collaborations to flourish. At the individual level, this means that sociologists and psychologists must work consciously and intentionally to overcome personal and departmental biases against the incorporation of competing theoretical paradigms into their work. At the institutional level, universities must continue to support interdisciplinary academic and research centers that bring together scholars from diverse disciplines concerned with common substantive problems.

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Social Structure and Personality


