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Revisiting Group Threat Theory Using Insights from Stigma Research

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on group threat theory (Blumer 1958), one of the main sociological approaches used to explain prejudice toward minority groups. It examines the utility of the theory when applied to prejudice in the context of migration-generated diversity and analyzes how its original formulation by Blumer compares with the conceptualization of stigma by Link and Phelan (2001). Similarities and differences are drawn between Blumer's "four feelings" in prejudice and Link and Phelan's "four components" constitutive of stigma. Despite overlapping, complementary, and at time divergent arguments, using these two approaches in tandem may overcome the limitations of group threat theory and, in the process, advance research into anti-immigrant sentiment. In turn, it is posited that scholarship on stigma may gain from incorporating the concept of threat into its framework.

Group Threat Theory

Group threat theory is an explanation of a dominant group's prejudice toward subordinate groups in society. The theory is based on the work of Blumer (1958), who in his seminal article, "Racial Prejudice as a Function of Group Position," discussed the role of threat in regard to social relations between the White majority and Black minority in the United States. Since then, group threat theory has been used to explain other instances of racial and ethnic prejudice and anti-immigrant sentiment. Beginning with Quillan's (1995) application of group threat theory to study European attitudes toward immigrants, thousands of studies related to immigration (according to Google Scholar almost 12,000) have cited Blumer's theory. In sociology and political science, group threat theory and related competition theories (Olzak 1992; Scheve and

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Slaughter 2001) are the most often tested accounts of prejudice in empirical studies of anti-immigrant sentiment, opposition to immigration, and support for political parties with explicitly anti-immigrant stances.

Fundamentally sociological, group threat theory (Blumer 1958) understands prejudice as a social phenomenon, dependent on the nature of social relations between racial groups. Specifically, when members of the racial majority group perceive a threat to their collective dominant social position, feelings of fear and anger manifest as prejudice toward a racial minority group. Prior to this theoretical proposition, prejudice was largely understood as something originating from innate dispositions, personality types, and/or individual experiences (e.g., Adorno et al. 1950; Allport 1954). By contrast, Blumer (1958) argued that prejudice arises from a real or perceived threat by a minority racial group to the majority racial group's dominant position. This "sense of social position" requires social categorization: identification with a racial in-group vis-à-vis a racial out-group. According to Blumer (1958:5):

> [A perceived threat] may be in the form of an affront to feelings of group superiority; it may be in the form of attempts at familiarity or transgressing the boundary line of group exclusiveness; it may be in the form of encroachment at countless points of proprietary claim; it may be a challenge to power and privilege; it may take the form of economic competition. Race prejudice is a defensive reaction to such challenging of the sense of group position. It consists of the disturbed feelings, usually of marked hostility, that are thereby aroused. As such, race prejudice is a protective device. It functions, however shortsightedly, to preserve the integrity and the position of the dominant group.

Limitations

Although research on racial attitudes lend empirical support for group threat theory (e.g., Bobo 1983; Dixon 2006; Quillian 1995), the application of it in explanations of native-born responses to immigration has yielded mixed results, leading some to question the theory's explanatory power (e.g., Eger et al. 2022; Hjerm 2007). We see this as stemming both from issues with its application in the field as well as limitations of the theory itself.

First, most of the previous research has tested a specific version of the theory. This version, sometimes referred to as realistic group conflict theory (Bobo 1983; Sherif and Sherif 1953), sees a direct relationship between immigration and anti-immigrant prejudice. Thus, in empirical studies, the relative size of the minority population has been the most consistent measure of group threat (Blalock 1967; Quillian 2006). In studies of anti-immigrant sentiment, threat is operationalized as the percentage of the population in a country or subnational region that is foreign born (Quillian 1995). However, recent meta-analysis studies cast doubt on the theory's explanatory power when threat is measured this way. Across 55 studies, Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes (2017) find both positive and negative relationships between out-group size and attitudes

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toward immigrants, and most are insignificant. Focusing on differences in the size of geographic units across 171 post-1995 studies, Kaufmann and Goodwin (2018) find some support for the theory: in the smallest and largest geographic units, the relative size of the out-group population corresponds to individual-level threat perceptions, but not when group size is measured in midrange units like neighborhoods. Most recently, a meta-analysis of 48 studies published between 1990 and 2017 (Amengay and Stockemer 2019) demonstrated that neither levels nor increases in objective immigration have consistent effects on radical right voting in Europe.

Taken together, these results indicate that the empirical relationship between objective immigration and out-group prejudice is not straightforward. Although population innumeracy likely contributes to the weak relationship between objective group size and natives' attitudes (Herda 2010), variation in how "immigrant" is actually measured (i.e., who counts as an immigrant) also plays a role (Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes 2017). For example, some scholars contend that the category "percent foreign born" is too broad and that the size of specific immigrant groups, such as non-Western (Schneider 2008) or non-White (Hjerm 2009), are more appropriate tests of the theory. This suggests, however, that anti-immigrant prejudice may not stem from being foreign born per se but from other characteristics, such as race or religion. Indeed, particular immigrant groups—including their native-born descendants—tend to be primary targets of hostilities (Dancygier et al. 2022) and discrimination (Bursell 2014, 2021). This has led some scholars to operationalize threat with the relative size of a more specific subpopulation, such as the share of a European country's non-European racial and ethnic minorities (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2016) rather than the relative size of the entire foreign-born population.

Further, most empirical studies also privilege indicators of economic competition. Examples at the individual level include natives' employment status, occupational skill level, and income (Haubert and Fussell 2006; Scheve and Slaughter 2001); at the contextual level, unemployment rates and other labor market conditions (Quillian 1995). This is, however, only one of many forms of threat, as Blumer points out in the above quote. According to Blumer (1958:5), perceived challenges to the dominant group's position may also include "an affront to feelings of group superiority," which also implicates the dominant group's subjective experiences: perceptions, fears, and concerns that are not necessarily consistent with either objective out-group size or zero-sum economic conditions. Indeed, elite political rhetoric (Bohman 2011), media attention (Czymara and Dochow 2018; Erhard et al. 2021; Van Klingeren et al. 2015), and even violence against immigrants (Eger and Olzak 2023) may increase the salience of immigration, activating threat and making anti-immigrant prejudice more likely. Thus, scholars increasingly acknowledge that perceptions of immigrants may ultimately matter more than objective immigration numbers (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2020; Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes 2017).

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Second, we emphasize that group threat theory was originally developed to explain anti-Black prejudice among White Americans, which calls into question whether it is also appropriate for explanations of anti-immigrant sentiment. Although the theory's scope conditions were never made explicit, the time and place of its formulation may limit its ability to explain a phenomenon that differs from social relations between a majority population and a historic, national minority, also understood as two racial groups. Consequently, applying the theory to other contexts may require considerations of differences in characteristics both of the dominant "perpetrator" group and the target group. Indeed, not all immigrant groups encounter the same degree of anti-immigrant prejudice (Ford 2011), which is related, at least partially, to their visibility in society and overt features such as skin color or religious practices (Schalk-Soekar et al. 2004).

While race is central to Blumer (1958), the original focus on a dyadic relationship between two racial groups implies that differences between subordinate groups, and how this feeds into prejudice, remains undertheorized. Applying the theory to attitudes toward a foreign-born population not only means overlooking important aspects of Blumer's theory regarding race but also obscures how anti-immigrant prejudice targets some groups of immigrants to greater degrees and in different ways than others. Further, while group threat requires collective identities, the theory does not address how the content of such identities play into feelings of threat and anti-immigrant prejudice. This may be important as studies show that native-born groups whose national identity is based on nonvoluntary features (e.g., ancestry, race, and cultural practices learned through early socialization) display higher levels of prejudice—at least toward certain groups of immigrants—compared to native-born groups that emphasize voluntary features (e.g., citizenship, language, and respect for laws and institutions) (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989). Hence, expanding group threat theory to account for heterogeneity, both in relation to immigrants as the target of prejudice and the collective identity of national majorities as the perpetrators, would be helpful to the study of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Third, it remains unclear what happens to prejudice when the perceived "threat," whatever it is, dissipates or decreases. Despite the key role assigned to "threat" in the account, group threat theory says little about what happens if important resources cease to be scarce or the out-group decreases in size or salience. For example, although operationalizing threat through mere numbers has yielded mixed results, the approach has been useful in relation to a sudden increase in the immigrant population. During the migration crisis of 2015, the political salience of immigration significantly increased throughout Europe (Eger et al. 2020) and increases in asylum seeking were met with a spike in anti-immigrant sentiment (Heath and Richards 2019; Messing and Ságvári 2019). Still, group threat theory provides no clues as to what should theoretically happen to prejudice once the migration crisis ended. In terms of empirical observations, some research suggests that anti-immigrant sentiment

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did not return to precrisis levels (Czymara 2020a; Velásquez and Eger 2022), which highlights the importance of adding a dynamic perspective to group threat theory.

Furthermore, recent research has revealed an integration paradox; that is, increased structural integration among immigrants does not equate to more positive attitudes toward the native-born population and host society (de Vroome et al. 2014; Steinmann 2019; Tolsma et al. 2012; Verkuyten 2016). From a group threat perspective, the theoretical expectations regarding structural integration are twofold: the immigrants best adapted to the host society should be less of a threat (at least culturally), and therefore face less prejudice, however, their stronger economic and political position may elicit other feelings of threat and thus more prejudice. While it is unclear what determines which of these scenarios is realized, research indicates that immigrants who are structurally better integrated, who theoretically should be less of a threat since they adopt the host society's "ways," often experience more alienation and feel less like they belong than those immigrants who are less structurally integrated. Subsequently, if one focuses solely on socioeconomic indicators, the most integrated immigrants articulate less positive attitudes toward the native population than one would expect (Geurts et al. 2021). Although there are several explanations for this pattern (e.g., van Doorn et al. 2013; van Maaren and van de Rijt 2020; Verkuyten 2016), this indicates at the very least, that native-born prejudice does not always disappear as structural integration increases.

To summarize, there are three main limitations to how group threat theory has been used in previous research to explain anti-immigrant prejudice:

1. A narrow focus on out-group size and economic indicators in empirical tests.
2. A limited ability to account for heterogeneity both within the target and the perpetrator group.
3. Vague or contradictory predictions in regard to decreasing threat.

The first point addresses how the theory has been applied but not necessarily the theory itself, whereas the second and third points implicate the theory itself. When applied to anti-immigrant prejudice, it becomes clear that certain aspects of the theory are undertheorized. Next, we look closer at the theoretical foundations, by comparing Blumer's original formulation of group threat theory to the conceptualization of stigma, as developed by Link and Phelan (2001).

Conceptual Comparison: Four Feelings versus Four Components

In his seminal piece, Blumer (1958) specified four feelings that are always present in racial prejudice. More than forty years later, Link and Phelan (2001) argued that stigma is rooted in the convergence of four interrelated

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components; interestingly, these components align partially with Blumer's four constitutive feelings. Table 3.1 illustrates how group threat theory relates to the conceptualization of stigma, identifying where these models overlap and where they differ. To achieve an effective comparison, Table 3.1 includes assumptions that underlie the different components, drawn from a larger theoretical discussion within each approach. To distinguish the constitutive components from these assumptions, the components are numbered and highlighted in gray. Although some sort of chronology is implied by the table, in the sense that "consequences" are listed last, the numbers do not specify a particular order of events, nor do they indicate the importance of the individual components to the process leading to prejudice/stigma. To be clear, Link and

Table 3.1 Conceptual comparison of group threat theory (Blumer 1958) and stigma (Link and Phelan 2001).

	Group Threat Theory: "Four Feelings"	Stigma: "Four Components"
Identification	Racial prejudice is a matter (a) of the racial identification made of oneself and of others.	1. *People distinguish and label human differences.* 2. *Labeled persons are placed in distinct categories to accomplish a degree of separation of "us" from "them."*
Hierarchy	Racial prejudice is a matter (b) of the way in which the identified groups are conceived in relation to each other, i.e., "sense of group position."	Stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power.
	1. *A feeling of superiority.*	
Stereotyping and alienation	Disparaging qualities are imputed to the subordinate racial group.	3. *Dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics—to negative stereotypes.*
	2. *A feeling that the subordinate race is intrinsically different and alien.*	
Resources	3. *A feeling of proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage.*	
Threat	4. *A fear and suspicion that the subordinate race harbors designs on the prerogatives of the dominant race.*	
Consequences		4. *Labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes.*

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Phelan explicitly state that stigma exists when the four interrelated components converge, and Blumer emphasizes that prejudice exists only when all four components are in place.

Identification

Blumer as well as Link and Phelan stress the primacy of identification and social categorization in the process leading to prejudice/stigma. For Blumer, racial identification lies at the heart of racial prejudice in the sense that holding such attitudes is contingent on group identification. As prejudice is essentially about relationships between groups, prejudiced individuals must, by definition, consider themselves members of a specific collective. Thus, from Blumer's perspective, "a scheme of racial identification is necessary as a framework for racial prejudice." Not accounting for this or for how the identified groups conceive of their position in relation to each other is "to miss what is logically and actually basic" (Blumer 1958:3). In the case of stigma, one of the basic components involves the distinction and labeling of human difference. Stigma presupposes that individuals distinguish and assign social significance to certain differences, albeit not to all. This process converges with a separation of an "unlabeled" us from a "labeled" them, in ways that increase social saliency and set the conditions for social interaction.

The labeling and sorting of individuals into social categories and groups, distinct from the ones assigning the labels, is a second constitutive component of stigma. As for the active principle of differentiation, or the characteristics that become the object for stigma, it may either sort individuals into larger collectives, based on skin color, origin, religion, and so forth, or function to single out specific individuals from a larger collective based on nonnormative behavior or illness. In this sense, stigma may be based on both group and individual characteristics: that is, both on features that are transferred across generations and hence, shared by family members, as well as on characteristics with greater within-family variation, which are not necessarily passed on from one generation to the next (see Phelan et al. 2008). The groups in Blumer's original formulation of group threat theory are distinguished on the basis of race, a "group characteristic," in that it is transferred across generations and thus often shared by members of the same family. In later applications to explain anti-immigrant prejudice, groups are often differentiated based on national origin (born inside or outside the country). As one's status as an immigrant, based on place of birth, rarely is transferred across generations, this departs from the principle of differentiation underlying the original theory. Still, at least for some ethnic and racial minority groups in societies, "immigrant status" does not seem to reflect objective individual experiences with migration. Native-born children and grandchildren of immigrants may be categorized by the majority group as "immigrants" (i.e., "second-" or "third-generation immigrants") and thus become targets of prejudice based on this status.

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While both perspectives emphasize that prejudice/stigma is contingent on social identification and categorization, it remains unclear why certain differences become salient but not others. Indeed, while Blumer places analytical primacy on groups, the focus lies on understanding how a sense of group position relates to prejudice once the groups are established. He does note, however, that the racial identification underlying racial prejudice "is not spontaneous or inevitable but a result of experience" (Blumer 1958:3) and assigns particular importance to collective and historical processes. Both identification per se and the central "sense of group position" are conceived of as historical products: as shaped and reshaped in a "complex human social and interpretative process" (Bobo 1999), a process in which abstract images, big events, political actors, and public discussions are more consequential than individual experiences and direct contact with other people (Blumer 1958). Still, why certain distinctions are assigned social meaning, while others are not, is not developed as a part of group threat theory.

Like Blumer, Link and Phelan stress the socially constructed nature of the categorizations underlying stigma. To underscore its basis in social processes, they use the word "label" instead of "attribute." Using "attribute," they argue, may signal that stigma is tied to a particular aspect of human difference. Using "label," on the other hand, suggests a less rigid and more socially negotiated basis, while simultaneously directing focus to the labeling, rather than the one labeled by others. Similar to group threat theory, to our knowledge, the stigma literature provides no further clues regarding why certain identities, attachments, and distinctions become socially relevant whereas others remain unimportant. Indeed, Link and Phelan (2001:368) end their discussion on distinguishing and labeling by saying:

> the critical sociological issue is to determine how culturally created categories arise and how they are sustained. Why are some human differences singled out and deemed salient by human groups and others ignored? What are the social, economic, and cultural forces that maintain the focus on a particular human difference?

Hierarchy, Stereotyping, and Alienation

A second aspect highlighted by both Blumer and Link and Phelan is the hierarchical ordering of various categories. The very starting point for Blumer is that prejudice should be understood as "a sense of group position." Besides tification, this also includes conceptions of how the groups are, and should be, positioned in relation to each other. Further, for prejudice to arise, this sense of intergroup ordering cannot be "about the same." Indeed, one of Blumer's four constitutive feelings is a self-assured sense "*of being naturally superior or better*" (Blumer 1958:4). Link and Phelan are also clear about stigma being contingent on unequal power relations. Although subordinate groups may

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be spiteful toward more powerful groups, the latter can never become "stigmatized." As long as they have the upper hand, in terms of political, social, and economic power, such processes will have limited bearing on their life chances. In this sense, all listed components of stigma must be exercised from higher up in the social hierarchy. This applies, for example, to the component of stigma which involves associating human differences with negative attributes, where the key is that "*dominant* cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics—to negative stereotypes" (Link and Phelan 2001:367) [italics ours].

Further, both group threat theory (in Blumer's original formulation) and stigma (as specified by Link and Phelan) point to alienation and stereotyping as constitutive features. According to Blumer, the dominant group's feeling of superiority is often expressed in how members impute denouncing and degrading qualities to the subordinate group, including "laziness, dishonesty, greediness, unreliability, stupidity, deceit and immorality" (Blumer 1958:4). He also emphasizes that assigning qualities to another group conversely, or "by opposition," implies defining their own group, suggesting that stereotyping also plays into the second constitutive feeling; namely, that the subordinate group is different and alien. While Link and Phelan put greater emphasis on social cognition when discussing stereotyping, they also highlight how such images relate to the distancing of the labeled "them" from an unlabeled "us." Stereotyping facilitates alienation, since "they" clearly represents a different type, but stereotypes also become more likely to resonate if "they" already are perceived as intrinsically different.

Taken together, we note significant overlap in how both group threat theory and stigma emphasize stereotyping, alienation as well as a power imbalance between the perpetrator/target, and the stigmatizer/stigmatized. Interestingly, however, Link and Phelan strongly push power as the one thing that cannot be taken out from the equation. Stigma, in their words, "*is entirely dependent on social, economic and political power—it takes power to stigmatize*" (Link and Phelan 2001:375). Blumer, by contrast, claims that although feelings of superiority and distinctiveness can lead to negative feelings toward the subordinate group, they do not in themselves engender prejudice. For prejudice to arise, he argues, feelings of superiority and distinctiveness on behalf of the dominant group must be supplemented by a feeling of proprietary claim and a fear of encroachment. As evident in Table 3.1, the rows "resources" and "threat" are empty in the stigma column.

Resources and Threat

The stigma and group threat accounts differ as to the role played by resources and threat. According to Blumer, a third feeling that is always present in prejudice as a sense of group position is a feeling of entitlement; this means that the dominant group feels it has the exclusive or principal right to certain resources

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and areas of privilege. This may concern everything from rights to employment and land, the usage of cultural symbols, access to schools, or positions of power. As long as the claims are solidified and institutionalized in the sense that they are accepted and seen as "natural" by most members in society, they do not explain prejudice, not even in combination with feelings of distinctiveness and superiority. Instead, prejudice arises only when "a fear or apprehension that the subordinate racial group is threatening, or will threaten, the position of the dominant group" (Blumer 1958:4) is added to the other three feelings. Such a felt challenge to the dominant groups' sense of group position sets off an emotional reaction, or "recoil" in Blumer's words, which according to group threat theory is essential to prejudice.

While threat is key to prejudice as a sense of group position, it is not included in Link and Phelan's four constitutive elements of stigma.[1] As for the feeling of proprietary claim, the emphasis on unequal power relations implies that resources and privilege are central to stigma. However, within the framework of stigma, a power differential implies an objectively unequal distribution not only in resources but in the ability to act. This differs from access to resources, as Blumer describes it, as an "imperative" or feeling of "what ought to be" (Blumer 1958:5). It also ties in with a broader discussion on the very source of prejudice/stigma, to which we return in the final discussion.

Consequences

The remaining part of Table 3.1 describes what the different perspectives posit regarding the consequences of prejudice/stigma. As group threat theory (in Blumer's original formulation) is a theory that explains prejudice, no description of consequences has been listed. Like most theories of prejudice, Blumer's focus lies exclusively on the perpetrator (i.e., the people who hold prejudiced attitudes), with the goal of identifying the source of their antipathies. By contrast, stigma takes a broader view in that it focuses on the entire process. This makes it an overarching theoretical framework that encompasses the stigmatizer, stigmatization, and the stigmatized. Thus, Link and Phelan stress consequences as one of the four constitutive components of stigma. Specifically, they argue that stigma exists first when the labeling, differentiation, and stereotyping generate unequal outcomes: "People are stigmatized when the fact that they are labeled, set apart, and linked to undesirable characteristics leads them to experience status loss and discrimination" (Link and Phelan 2001:371).

[1] This does not mean that threat is not central in specific stigma theories, e.g., in terror management theory (Solomon et al. 1991) or theory of identity threat (Steele 1997). Still, in Link and Phelan's definition, threat is not considered a constitutive element of stigma, which is a clear departure from the fundamental role it plays in prejudice according to group threat theory.

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Discussion

In this chapter we have critically discussed the explanatory power of group threat theory in accounting for prejudice in the context of migration-generated diversity. We have also conceptually compared the constitutive features of prejudice, in Blumer's original group threat model, to stigma, as defined in Link and Phelan (2001). While certainly not exhaustive, this undertaking has begun to shed light on the extent to which the concept of stigma may be helpful in overcoming limitations associated with the application of group threat theory in studies of anti-immigrant prejudice. In this concluding section, we identify three areas where we see potential for advancement.

The first criticism addressed how most studies have tested a specific version of group threat theory, analytically equating "threat" with out-group size. The explanatory power of these models is limited, and they also imply a significant loss of nuance compared to Blumer's original writing. Thus, we believe that much is to be gained from pursuing group threat as an explanation of anti-immigrant attitudes with more sensitivity to the perceived nature as well as collective and historical roots of such feelings, as originally emphasized in Blumer (1958). These factors have attracted some interest in more recent studies (Bohman 2011; Strabac 2011), and we encourage future tests of group threat theory to follow suit. Our comparison reveals great similarities between Blumer's understanding of racial prejudice and stigma, as defined by Link and Phelan (2001), in terms of how both accounts emphasize the socially constructed nature of identities and categories ("labels"); thus, we consider the two perspectives to be *overlapping* rather than complementary in this regard. However, we also note that both group threat theory and stigma remain vague about why certain distinctions are assigned social meaning and not others.

In our second criticism, we argued that because group threat theory originally was developed to understand the relationship between two racial groups—a majority population and a historic national minority—applying the theory to understand anti-immigrant prejudice requires us to consider the heterogeneity of both the target and perpetrator groups. A group threat explanation of why some immigrant groups face more prejudice posits that they constitute a greater threat to the national majority. Meanwhile, if greater threat leads to more prejudice, by consequence, the largest, most powerful immigrant group should also face the most prejudice. This prediction is rarely confirmed in research that compares opposition toward specific immigrant or minority groups (Ford 2011; Spruyt and Elchardus 2012). While the nature of the threat may vary, in the sense that a group with limited economic or political power may still be considered a welfare or a cultural threat, group threat theory does not specify what determines when a given threat becomes activated. In fact, for many immigrant groups, this seems to be a matter of shifting goal posts, in the sense that there is always something threatening about their presence. This, in turn, suggests to us that their vulnerable position may have additional roots

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beyond threat, and may stem from, for instance, a stigmatized position. Thus, we identify this as one area where we believe the concept of stigma could be useful, *complementing* a group threat approach by shedding light on the stickiness of certain prejudices.

Relatedly, our third criticism points to a lack of theorizing in situations where threat is objectively diminishing; for instance, when immigration is halted due to the closure of national border, reversed at the local level due to the closure of a refugee center, or the result of structural integration. As an example of the latter, we referred to research on the integration paradox, which indicates that reduced (cultural) threat at least does not cancel out immigrants' experiences of being targets of prejudice. This relates to our discussion earlier on how some immigrant groups continuously appear to constitute a threat in the eyes of the native population, but it also raises a broader question about the role of threat. This question is by no means new (see Bobo 1983) but was made evident through our comparison (Table 3.1). Threat is the core component of group threat theory but has not been included in Link and Phelan's stigma model. According to Blumer, prejudice is first and foremost "a protective device" (Blumer 1958:5) that the dominant group adopts to preserve supremacy in the wake of a perceived challenge to their group position. As for the main motives behind stigma, Phelan et al. (2008) discuss three distinct functions, where the first is exploitation and domination. Stigma, in this sense, prevails because it serves the interests of more powerful groups by legitimizing and preserving the existing order (i.e., by keeping the stigmatized down). This, however, cannot be equated with threat, because the main driver on behalf of the dominant group is not a fear of losing one's privilege but rather a desire to maintain privilege and power. The difference compared to any threat model, in the words of Phelan et al. (2008:363), lies in "what is at stake for the perpetrators." In the case of perceived threat, a group feels vulnerable to a loss of power, whereas in the case of stigma the clear imbalance in power is what makes the act of stigmatizing even possible. It can also be understood in terms of a difference in emphasis between prejudice, as defined by Blumer (1958), and stigma, as understood by Link and Phelan (2001) and Phelan et al. (2008), concerning the extent to which prejudice/stigma (from the perspective of the perpetrator) is used primarily as a tool for the powerful or for the threatened. Here, we find that group threat and stigma imply *diverging* or even *conflicting* perspectives.

Our comparison has generated insights that should advance scholarship in both fields. Specifically, we believe that stigma may be useful in understanding how prejudice is related to other phenomena such as labeling, which in turn may provide important clues about the stickiness of such biases. This includes the idea that stigma may reinforce prejudice in ways that do not involve threat; for instance, through institutionalized bias and the persistence of stigma's other constitutive components (e.g., labeling, stereotyping, and alienation). In addition, we believe that group threat theory can be useful to stigma research; for

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instance, it may shed light on why levels of stigma vary due to the degree and type of threat that stigmatizers perceive. We encourage scholars who utilize a stigma framework to explore the ways in which group threat theory may further enhance their research.

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