

Toward an Integrative CAPS Approach to Racial/ Ethnic Relations

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ABSTRACT The original CAPS formulation focused on the role of the individual's CAPS system in relation to situations, formalizing a person-situation framework. Subsequent research and theorizing on the culturally embedded CAPS system (C-CAPS) began to spell out how culture, context, and group-level processes intersect with both persons and situations. The contributions in this special section provide insights into the enormous complexity and the multiple layers through which context and persons "make each other up" in racial/ethnic relations. The challenge for personality psychologists is to examine and illuminate this interpenetration of context and person concretely and with increasing depth and precision. The CAPS framework provides a meta-level guide for this mission, and the present contributions illustrate the framework's heuristic value.

Looking back for a moment, in December 1994, Shoda and Mischel were struggling to formalize a conception of the "situated person" that they had begun to imagine more than 20 years earlier. Two decades had been spent collecting thick empirical data to directly observe and probe the organization and consistency of the individual's social behavior as it plays out in vivo across different situations and over time (e.g., Shoda, Mischel, & Wright, 1994). Mischel and Shoda felt they had mostly digested the findings and their key theoretical implications and believed they called for a drastically revised conception of the nature of situations and their links to dispositions. The

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empirical discoveries, they believed, enabled a new understanding of the nature of the stability that characterizes individual differences and the dynamic processes that underlie their expression in thought, feelings, and social behavior. Even more important, the Cognitive–Affective Personality System (CAPS) model made it possible to systematically conceptualize and investigate the conditions under which the CAPS organization becomes open to modification, reorganization, and change, expressed in the *if . . . then . . .* situation–behavior signatures of personality that characterize the person.

Before mailing the CAPS manuscript to *Psychological Review*, Shoda and Mischel intensely debated whether to fill or leave empty the many circles that interconnect and interact within CAPS (as shown in Figure 4 of Mischel & Shoda, 1995, and again in Figure 2 of Mendoza-Denton and Goldman-Flythe, this issue). To reiterate, these circles represent the particular types of cognitive and affective mental representations that become activated in different individuals and personality types as they interact with different types of psychological situations in their social lives. The circles were left empty to make absolutely clear that CAPS was designed as a coherently organized meta-system with regard to contents. The hope was and remains that CAPS might become not the Mischel–Shoda model of personality but a general framework for building a more cumulative, integrative science of persons interacting dynamically with their sociocultural psychological life situations, each reciprocally influencing the other. The open circles are an invitation to other researchers to fill them as needed for their goals and substantive questions, regardless of the domain they were researching.

The contributors to this special section on racial/ethnic relations have answered this invitation, and it is a remarkable experience to consider their contributions at a unique transformative moment in the long and painful history of race and prejudice in America. We write this just after the United States elected its first African American president, and giant headlines worldwide exclaim a single capitalized word: OBAMA. As the United States, and indeed the world, participate in and eagerly anticipate the consequences of this watershed election, the contributions to this special section provide us with some promising initial tools toward achieving an increasingly deep scientific understanding of the interplay between dispositions, situations, and contexts.

A Think Tank Invitation

At a time of tight research funding, but also renewed hope, let us indulge in a wish-fulfilling fantasy: An all-expenses-paid invitation arrives for a year at the newly founded CAPS TTRRP: the CAPS Think Tank for Race Relations and Prejudice. It is in an idyllic setting on a beautiful lake, high but not too high on a mountaintop, with a good French chef and a great wine cellar. A Wall Street tycoon has funded the effort; she has always been fascinated by human behavior and insists on philanthropy guided by sound theory and research. Inspired by the Obama election, she sees the potential for changing the landscape of racial relations in the United States.

The invitation is to you, the reader, and to all the contributors in the present special section of the *Journal of Personality*. The mission statement for the planned year is as follows:

To brainstorm how the contributions in the *Journal of Personality*'s special section, and any relevant other work, can be integrated further through collaboration among research teams, within a CAPS framework, to enable an increasingly precise, incisive, and comprehensive scientific understanding of personality, race/ethnicity, and ways to improve intergroup relations in years to come. You also will be expected to specify the organization and processing dynamics that underlie and help explain different reactions to the Obama election and its aftermath.

So after getting over the disbelief and initial joy, let us begin by "filling in" the empty circles of the CAPS system that Mischel and Shoda (1995) deliberately left blank. We already have a good beginning from the contributors to this special section, who used the CAPS framework to seamlessly link individual differences in personality and social cognition to prejudice and ethnic relations. Each focused on different aspects of the process, using the particular mediating units to which their work is devoted. Each showed how the constructs that guided their work, and the empirical discoveries they made, are readily integrated into the CAPS framework. These contributions substantially enrich that framework. In turn, they serve to connect work on race relations and personality to a broad, general model of how people interpret their experiences and the social and

cognitive–affective processes that underlie their subsequent behavior patterns.

Building on this, the challenge for the think tank year now is twofold: The first is to take the next steps toward building an increasingly integrative and cumulative science for the domain of race and ethnic relations and prejudice. The second is to anticipate and make sense of what lies ahead for the state of racial relations moving forward. To ensure that ideas and theorizing are grounded in the thick data of real persons living real lives, it will be important to keep reminding each other between the gourmet meals to return to the phenomena unfolding following the Obama election. It is a rare and wonderful opportunity to conduct studies that are not necessarily limited to college students sitting for half an hour in laboratory cubicles.

Phenomena in Search of Explanation: Challenges to Our Science from the Obama Election Experience

How can we, as participants, witnesses, and researchers of the emotions and discourse surrounding race and racial relations in this new era, make better sense of real-world experiences like those we see unfolding around the 2008 presidential election? The election of Barack Obama as U.S. president brought an unparalleled display of collective emotion to the forefront of the national stage. Dramatically personalized by the tears of Colin Powell, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, and Oprah Winfrey, Americans were visibly overjoyed, literally moved to tears, as the networks called the election in favor of Obama. Regardless of their vote and race, everyone seemed to recognize they were witnessing a special day in the history of civil rights in this country. In the words of a colleague's email on the evening of November 4, 2008:

I can't stop crying. Obama's really, really done it. We're not there yet; we have a long way to go. And, I have to say that the strength of my feelings tonight has made me realize that I didn't expect to see this within my lifetime. I thought I would be dead, and at best able to contribute to the wheel that turned. But I'm not dead. . . . This is real. The brightness of daybreak isn't here, but I think the crest of civil twilight has appeared over the top of the hills. . . . I

think we can do even greater good within our lifetimes than I previously had estimated.

These words came from an intergroup researcher who, as it happens, is White. This colleague's words remind us what matters in evoking such responses is not skin deep. As we have argued elsewhere (Mendoza-Denton, Ayduk, Shoda, & Mischel, 1997), and as the articles in this special section illustrate, deeply understanding people's behavior requires considering not only group-level differences but also the CAPS system of values, beliefs, and knowledge that generates behavior. And, at least anecdotally, our colleague's words remind us that networks of values and goals—such as an appreciation of the continuing struggle and meaning of the Obama election for civil rights—can travel across the racial divide.

At the same time that we joyfully recognize that people of different racial groups can share networks of CAUs, it is also important and sobering to recognize—both at a personal level and as social scientists—that although many shed tears on election night, they were not all for the same reasons. For example, in the New York Young Republican Club, there also were tears, yet those tears reflected anger, disappointment, and even fear (Hakim, 2008). People vary in how they react to the same event, and even same surface-level reactions can be the result of different CAPS processes.

The original CAPS formulation (Mischel & Shoda, 1995) focused largely on understanding the role of the CAPS system in relation to situations: This was a logical first step in formalizing a Person \times Situation framework. Although Mischel and Shoda of course mentioned culture and the larger social-historical context in their original works, it was later research and theorizing on the culturally embedded CAPS system (*C-CAPS*; Mendoza-Denton, Shoda, Ayduk, & Mischel, 1999; Mendoza-Denton & Mischel, 2007) that began to spell out in detail how culture, context, and group-level processes intersect with *both* persons and situations. A look at Figure 2 of Mendoza-Denton and Goldman-Flythe's introductory piece to this special section highlights the enormous complexity and number of layers through which context and persons "make each other up"—words penned by Shweder (1990) that became a defining phrase of cultural psychology. The challenge for cultural psychologists has always been to examine the interpenetration of context and person concretely and that is also exactly the challenge that the CAPS and

C-CAPS framework help meet (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). The contributions to this special section provide specific examples of how to think about persons in contexts as well as contexts in persons from a CAPS perspective. At the same time, the election of Barack Obama also makes clear the many ways that people behave in unexpected ways, prompting us to expand our theoretical models and think about previously unidentified CAPS dynamics. We explore here a couple of these unexpected turns.

Construal/Encoding: The Lay Scientist's Race Theories

Hong, Chao, and No (this issue) focus on the crucial role of the individual's construal or encoding of the "situation." In the domain of intergroup race relations, the "situation" largely consists of race-relevant information about people. To understand race relations, Hong and colleagues focus on how lay theories of essentialism guide and constrain the processing of race-relevant information within a CAPS approach. Hong et al. themselves recognize that these ideas echo the work of George Kelly, who viewed the person as a lay scientist and indeed as a meaning maker. As Kelly eloquently emphasized, people adopt or generate theories and hypotheses that inform their personal constructs about the social world, other people, and themselves. These personal constructs serve as templates that guide subsequent thinking and behavior within the domains to which they apply, as people try to make sense of their experience

Mischel was a George Kelly student at the time that Kelly was completing his 1955 book, *A Theory of Personality: The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. Impressed by its enduring importance, Shoda and Mischel explicitly incorporated the concept of the construal (interpretation) or encoding of social information as the first (and arguably most important) CAU in the cognitive-affective processing system (see Mischel & Shoda, 1995, Table 1, p. 253) and in its predecessor in "Toward a Cognitive Social Learning Reconceptualization of Personality" (see Mischel, 1973, Table 1, p. 275).

In their emphasis on the importance of the person's lay theory and constructs, Hong and her associates continue to recognize the importance of lay constructs in the construction of meaning. Kelly often said that personal constructs were like the eyeglasses through which we see the world, while whipping his own spectacles away from his eyes and then slowly, dramatically, replacing them to drive

home his point: To understand another person's world, you have to try to see it through his or her glasses or eyes, not through your own. Our theories and constructs are our psychological eyeglasses.

Hong and colleagues focus on two such eyeglasses, illustrating in depth and detail how opposing theories about race are linked to distinctive differences in how racial information is encoded and are associated with differences in cognition, feeling, and motivation that become activated in the processing of such information. At one pole of their lay theory continuum, race reflects what they call "fixed core essence." It is not malleable or open to change, and it is diagnostic of a host of associated characteristics, including stable traits, abilities, and behaviors. The lay theory at the opposite pole, called "social constructionist," denies or rejects the existence of such "racial essence." They note, "resonating with CAPS, our lay theory approach focuses on how common people's understanding about the nature of race sets up meaning systems within which they interpret and understand social information as racially keyed and, in turn, invokes a specific course of action." Their work yields an impressive network of sequelae of endorsing such different conceptions of the meaning of race. Importantly, they also point to some of the social and contextual factors that may significantly influence lay theories about race and potentially change them. We may be witnessing one such factor in this era: the election of 2008.

A Real Person Changes His Lay Theory of Race

The Obama victory seems an ideal *in vivo* context, a natural laboratory, for posing challenging questions about lay scientists' race theories: How well did voters' theories about race predict their voting behavior? Can their theories provide insight and understanding into their postelection feelings, thoughts, and reactions? Beyond these questions, the natural laboratory—the world outside our laboratory walls—also challenges us to understand phenomena that may not have been anticipated by our theories.

Let us take a specific example, reported days after the election in a *New York Times* piece titled "The Transformation of Levittown" (Sokolove, 2008). The article tries to understand how Obama won over the blue collar vote in extremely conservative Levittown, Pennsylvania, which has only 2% African American residents and is filled with mostly older Whites who did not attend college. The *Times*

describes a 48-year-old man, a heating and air-conditioning technician, standing in line early on election day, dressed in jeans, sweat shirt, and a National Rifle Association baseball cap. He said that he was about to vote for Obama although a few months earlier he could not have imagined it. "I have to admit his race made my decision harder. I was brought up that way. And I don't like his name. I'll admit that too." He then apparently joked about the Democratic choice in the primary being between a Black man and a woman (Senator Clinton)—using the crude term for each. Asked how he would feel about winding up with a Black president, he remarked, "I do think it's an historic election. Part of me feels like it would be really cool."

As the Obama presidency continues, it will be critical to examine potential shifts away from essentialist theories of race. If Obama's election, indeed, "recasts the national conversation on race" (Kaufman & Fields, 2008), it is crucial that we capture the processes involved. Who changes their theories and who does not in the face of new and contradictory information? What conditions and internal reorganizations enable or prevent such change? For example, when and why do people's lay race theories become more resistant to disconfirming evidence, making them, in Kelly's phrase, victims of "hardening of the constructs"? When do their theories become less preemptive, more permeable, flexibly adapting in response to changes in the information? Given the amazing phenomena unfolding in race relations at this time, it will be especially important to begin to specify the organization of the interconnections and pathways among the CAUs that differentiate the processing dynamics and CAPS structure of individuals who change their theory about race.

MOTIVATIONS/EXPECTATIONS

Although the CAPS approach calls attention to the crucial role of construal in the processing of social information, as discussed above, it equally emphasizes the importance of the motivations, goals, expectations, and feelings that the construal activates. From a CAPS perspective, the research on motivation to control prejudice reviewed by Butz and Plant (this issue) seems highly relevant to understanding nuances in ways that people reacted to the election of Obama. A point we made earlier was that the same outward behavior may not

map one-to-one onto a single psychological experience—people construe events differently, are led to similar emotions through different CAPS networks of activation, and may experience subsequent events differently. The work of Butz and Plant helps us understand this in the context of the elated reactions observed following Obama's election. For example, knowing a given voter's level of internal versus external motivation to control prejudice may yield insights into whether that voter's reaction to Obama's election reflects "effective" versus "determined/dedicated" control of prejudice. This is an important distinction to make because, as we move forward from 2008, changing racial relations effectively will require addressing explicit as well as implicit prejudices. Although neither public nor their private behavior would allow us to distinguish between the "effective" and the "dedicated," because both groups would ardently support Obama and make a very explicit personal choice to not be prejudiced, it is important to be able to know which voters continue to harbor implicit prejudices that are likely to emerge, for example, *if* tired, or *if* their self-regulatory resources are depleted. The ideas outlined by Butz and Plant (this issue) help us understand the real world laboratory while challenging us to look a little deeper within it.

A Reverse Bradley Effect

Again, however, the real-world laboratory urges us to consider new permutations we had not considered before. For example, prior to the election, many feared the potential for a "Bradley effect." People worried that, similar to Tom Bradley, who lost the 1982 California gubernatorial election despite polling predicting the contrary, Obama's advantage in the polls prior to the 2008 election reflected only a tendency for people to inform pollsters that they planned to vote for Obama so as to appear egalitarian, only to vote against him in the privacy of the polling booth. The Bradley effect, then, centers around those that Butz and Plant (this issue) would refer to as "externally motivated" or "compliant": They want to appear unprejudiced in public yet in private express their prejudice.

However, the Bradley effect did not materialize. In fact, some polls even *underestimated* the margin of victory for Obama. Though likely explanations for this include biased sampling in preelection polling that did not reach many African Americans, one intriguing alternative interpretation (in terms of CAPS) advanced to explain

support for Obama is the “reverse Bradley” effect, which posits that some conservative voters might have felt uncomfortable expressing their support for Obama in *public* but were able to do so in *private*. This possibility—a kind of external motivation to appear prejudiced—is understandably not something that has been readily considered in research on racial/ethnic relations, yet calls for a dynamic analysis of how the current context and historical zeitgeist leads to novel CAPS configurations. Although unexpected effects that are not anticipated by our theories are bound to happen, it is important that these theories nevertheless be able to take account of the fact that culture and people do change and keep evolving. These questions are reminiscent of the road toward reconciling both stability and change in personality, and we view the CAPS framework as a useful springboard from which to launch new research on this exciting new era of race relations.

From Person Variables to Persons

Our think tank scenario focuses on how to link and integrate the present contributions and other relevant work on race and intergroup relations to see how they might play out together in different individuals and types as they live their lives and have to deal with race and ethnic “social information and relationships” and prejudice in the postelection era. As researchers in a nomothetic science, we deal with “variables” and the possible effects of individual differences on those variables on subsequent behavior. But as we try to understand, better predict, and potentially change behavior in today’s world of race relations, we need to remember that personality is the field of psychology that Gordon Allport founded to focus *not* on variables in isolation but rather on how variables and processes come together to form distinctive individuals, real persons. It was exactly for that Allport goal—albeit with very different strategies and methods—that CAPS was developed.

Our think tank fantasy has so far focused on how the important person variables illustrated in the research of the contributions in this special issue can be integrated within a CAPS framework to create models of real persons. Although everyone, as Allport recognized, may be unique, there are nevertheless many people who for many purposes can be grouped together based on similarity in their

relevant *if . . . then . . .* profiles and behavioral signatures and their underlying processing dynamics. How do we achieve this goal?

Bottom-Up Versus Top-Down Approaches

As we imagine being able to account for the many different kinds of reactions surrounding the Obama election—a central mission of our think tank invitation—we must remind ourselves not to be fooled by outward appearances. We need to look beyond race, for example, and recognize that members of different groups can actually share common CAPS networks. We have to look below surface-level behavior and recognize that same outward reactions can reveal very different dynamics. Rather than looking at nominal groupings of people (e.g., by skin color) and situations (e.g., by their reactions to the election), a CAPS approach makes clear that people act on situations that are *psychologically* similar to them (e.g., the election as the dawn of a new chapter in the struggle for civil rights; the election as an opportunity to publicly display egalitarianism even though one harbors private prejudices). The distinction between nominal and psychological situations lies precisely at the heart of both Mischel and Shoda's (1995) CAPS and Mendoza-Denton and Mischel's (2007) C-CAPS frameworks. To the degree that psychological situation groupings are context specific, it is our task to uncover those local meanings in the aftermath of the Obama election. At least two strategies can be used as tools in this uncovering.

Bottom-Up Approaches: An Ear to the Ground

Imagine that through collaboration by the researchers during our year at the think tank we now know the point positions on our continua of many people who stood on those 2008 election lines. We know their scores, for example, on race-based rejection sensitivity, essentialism–social constructivism, external–internal motivation with regard to prejudice, and a myriad of other important variables that may include social dominance orientation, degree of past interracial contact, and racial identity among many others. Using clustering techniques, it is possible to identify behavior classes, situation classes, and ultimately person classes from people's responses to relevant inventories (see, e.g., Wang, Leu, & Shoda, 2008; Wright & Mischel, 1988). Exploratory in nature, this approach can help

identify common patterns among those individuals who, for example, were staunchly racist but ended up voting for Obama. This kind of strategy works well for the types of dynamics that we might have trouble anticipating (given the changing nature of cultures and people) or that our constructs might not easily predict.

Using this approach, we might find, for example, a subset of African Americans who engage in less self-stereotyping (Sinclair, Pappas, and Lun, this issue) than they did prior to Obama's election and discover that this group is (again hypothetically) disproportionately likely to have also decreased in their levels of rejection sensitivity (RS)-race. This might in turn suggest that Obama's historic election precipitated a change in these individuals in their perception of the permeability of racial barriers and the inevitability of stereotypes in intergroup encounters (see Hall & Miller, 2008), leading to behavioral changes in their own interactions. In sum, bottom-up approaches allow us to put an ear to the ground, as it were, and listen to naturally occurring patterns in the data that can then be analyzed more deeply. The data speak to us, and we answer back with theory.

Top-Down Approaches: Grounded in Theory

Alternatively, researchers can begin with a theory of the internal processing dynamics that may characterize a type and are then able to hypothesize the distinctive *if . . . then . . .* profile for that type as well as the psychological trigger features that define the profile. This strategy characterizes top-down approaches, which are best suited to understanding main effects of a given variable or interactions among discrete numbers of theoretically relevant variables.

The contributions in this issue illustrate such interactions well. For example, Mendoza-Denton & Goldman-Flythe (this issue) describe the dynamic of race-based rejection sensitivity as comprising a cascade of expectations, perceptions, and behavioral reactions. The behavioral patterns associated can themselves be attenuated through successful self-regulatory strategies (Ayduk et al., 2000), through ethnic identity processes (Mendoza-Denton, Pietrzak, & Downey, 2008), and even through the interpersonal context (e.g., by having cross-race friends; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008). Sinclair et al. (this issue) recognize how self-stereotyping is a behavioral reaction that results from the interaction of multiple CAUs in

interpersonal interactions: A person has an affiliative *goal* with an interaction partner as well as a *belief* that this interaction partner will hold prejudiced views toward him or her. Similarly, Butz and Plant (this issue) discuss the potential for effective self-regulatory strategies in controlling implicit prejudice and provide a potential route toward effective controlled prejudice profiles from determined (and even unmotivated) profiles.

It is also possible to understand, within a CAPS network, interactions among the constructs that headline this special section. For example, if self-stereotyping involves an expectation or belief that other people are likely to hold stereotypical views of oneself, it is worth testing whether, in interpersonal situations where there is high affiliative motivation, people high in race-based rejection sensitivity might be *more* likely to self-stereotype. Finally, within a CAPS network, it is possible to model change within CAPS systems as a function of environmental or contextual events. In this vein, it is exciting to consider how Obama's election might trigger changes toward positive self-stereotyping. As Hong et al. (this issue) discuss, media provide much of the content of culturally shared stereotypes, and it seems possible that if Obama's election changes the discourse surrounding African Americans in this country, we might see such changes reflected in self-stereotyping as well.

Final Thoughts: From Think Tank Fantasy to Executable Plans

How do we move from imagining an idyllic think tank to actually enacting future research that allows us to capture the complexity—and the hope—of events such as the Obama election? In some cases, it is possible to amass an archive of attitudinal and individual difference measures in anticipation of a given event. Not all events give us warning, however, and those that occur naturally rarely do. Although researchers sometimes find themselves in a position to compare postevent responses with responses or measures that were collected prior to the event (see, e.g., Levy, Freitas, Mendoza-Denton, & Kugelmass, 2006), such cases are exceptional. A viable alternative is to prime people with evocative images and sounds of a particular event or moment in history (e.g., Mendoza-Denton et al., 1997) so that they can relive it or even prompt them to vividly imagine themselves in a given situation (e.g., Mendoza-Denton, Ayduk, Mischel, & Shoda, 2001). Alternatively, as No et al. (2008) have

done, one can prime different lay theories of race, for example, and then assess how they influence reactions to various social stimuli.

The contributions to this special section point to only a small slice of the myriad of variables that research in personality and social psychology has identified as helpful for understanding intergroup relations. But they provide a solid base from which to try to further identify conditions and processes that can be harnessed to improve race relations—a hope that the Obama presidency has renewed (Kaufman & Fields, 2008). The papers in this special issue illustrate the potential value of the CAPS framework for that mission. Many more empty circles are waiting to be filled.

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