

Communication and beliefs about racial equality

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, we examine the effects of location in the social structure and communication processes on whites' responses to societal change conceptions of equality (structural equality): one that entailed beliefs about abstract notions of equality and one that pertained to concrete reference-based (blacks') conception of inequality. A recent national survey provided the data to test eleven hypotheses derived from theorizing in the area of stratification beliefs. Using covariance analysis, all our predictions received at least partial support. We found that those less well placed in the social system were more likely to embrace institutional change solutions to inequality and that those who attend more to television news were more likely to embrace structural racial inequality. On the other hand, while both television news and newspaper exposure had a positive influence on interpersonal discussion, the relationships of this variable with one of the equality measures indicated that engaging in more interpersonal discussion lead to less of an endorsement of structural racial inequality. Finally, those who embraced the general conception of equality were less likely to endorse race-specific structural inequality. We outlined some implications of our findings for social policy with some suggestions for further research.

KEY WORDS: racial equality, dominant ideology, location in the social structure, structural equation modeling, communication processes

INTRODUCTION

The history of Africans in the US has been represented by the recurring theme of abuse and systematic oppression. Racial inequality has persisted since the slaves won emancipation in 1863. Although the most obvious forms of this subjugation have waned, the residuals, traces and manifestations remain. Racial obstacles to equal political and civil rights have been essentially removed (at least at the federal level) and government activity has shifted from perpetuating discrimination and inequality to eliminating it.

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Most African-Americans live in metropolitan areas, many of them in the North, and work for wage or salary for private industry or government. Reich (1981) noted that although there has been a marked decrease in ethnic discrimination over the course of the century, the US has a large racial minority of blacks who are still apart from the white majority, or what has been referred to as two United States, one white and one black (Kerner Commission, 1968). Racial inequities in educational achievement, patterns of unemployment and income levels are still present (Farley, 1984; Farley and Allen, 1987).

A small but significant number of African-Americans have professional and managerial jobs. The majority, however, are employed in low-level clerical, blue-collar or service positions. Some survive through welfare, unemployment compensation and other transfer payments (Reich, 1981).¹

Black-white patterns in the US have changed markedly over the past 2 decades (Pettigrew, 1985); however, the state of American thinking about race and the direction racial attitudes might follow reveal no consensus (Schuman et al., 1985). With respect to racial progress, some indicators provide positive signs (Farley, 1977, 1984; Pettigrew, 1985). On the macro-level, for example, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 secured African-Americans' political participation; educational attainment of young African-Americans has eclipsed that of previous generations and has begun reducing the gap in schooling across gender; occupational improvement of black workers has been substantial; black married couples gained nearly 3 percent in real family income over a 10-year period as compared to white married couples over the same period; black business has expanded.

On the micro-level, these positive indicators have been reflected in inter-racial interaction and attitudes. By the 1970s, white attitudes had rejected overt forms of racial discrimination. Schuman et al. (1985) reported that some survey data indicated that white attitudes shifted from general acceptance of segregation and discrimination in the 1940s to a new and equally pervasive commitment to tolerance, racial equality and integration in the 1970s.

A less promising, even dismal portrayal of American race relations may also be presented. To illustrate, the following indicators have been proffered. Despite electoral gains, African-Americans still represent less than 3 percent of the nations elected officials and typically can gain office only in predominantly black districts. Although young African-Americans now finish high school, college has become the most important employment criterion and only 13 percent of this group as compared with 25 percent of whites had completed 4 years of college by 1982. African-American occupational upgrading is concentrated among younger members of the labor force. Only African-American married couples showed real income gains, and they are a declining proportion of black families. African-American business remains a microscopic element of the US economy, accounting for less than 2 percent of the total receipts of US firms in 1977. Moreover, the growth of this very small sector is dependent on the federal government (Pettigrew, 1985; Reich, 1981).

On the micro-level, much smaller changes are suggested when the object of enquiry moves beyond racial injustice in principle and moves closer to behavior commitment. Jackman and Muha (1984) and Sears and associates (Sears et al., 1979; Kinder and Sears, 1981; Sears and Kinder, 1985) argued that unless an individual subscribes to the actualization of principles through government action, the principles are hollow. That is, commitment to implementation is an important and relevant indicator of change.

As the above scenarios indicate, there are conflicting observations concerning the present racial landscape. Both attitudinal and behavioral evidence have been accumulated at different levels of analyses to support the various theses. A keen observer pointed out the 'rule of thumb is that black data look best when compared to earlier black data but pale when compared to current white data' (Pettigrew, 1985). Similarly, Farley (1984) maintained different observers may examine the identical racial data and draw opposite conclusions about whether the status of African-Americans has improved or deteriorated, depending on whether they focus on relative or absolute changes.

It is clear, however, that there is no research to support the claim that blacks' opportunity has always been or is now equal to whites' due to improvement in recent years, or that blacks now experience better than average opportunity because of preferential treatment (Kluegel and Smith, 1982).

The paradox of real progress in American race relations and continued racism is striking and a number of macro-level and micro-level explanations have been proposed (Kluegel and Smith, 1981). Whereas, older discriminatory forms of total exclusion were blatant and direct, which made them easily discernible, new forms have arisen that are much more subtle, indirect and ostensibly non-racial (Kinder and Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1982; Pettigrew, 1985).

Acknowledging the complexity of race relations and the different levels in which it may be examined, this study attempts to explain contemporary white beliefs, particularly as they relate to conceptions of equality, by employing insights from recent theoretical advances in this area. We will place greater emphasis on the communication, or symbolic reality, component. Our research question is: What are the predictors of the contemporary attitudes of white Americans toward equality? To what extent do the news media and interpersonal discussion of political issues foster particular notions of equality, racial and non-racial?

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In elaborating our perspective on inequality, we borrowed from the work of Kluegel and Smith (see Kluegel and Smith, 1981, 1983, 1986; Smith and Kluegel, 1984). They mounted a program of research that proposed that whites' beliefs about blacks' opportunity and their ideas about equality are

in part influenced by the prevailing beliefs about stratification held by the American public.

Kluegel and Smith provide a general theoretical perspective on beliefs and attitudes towards equality. They proposed that attitudes towards equality and related issues are influenced by three elements of the US social, economic and political environment: a stable, dominant ideology about economic inequality; individuals' social and economic states; and specific beliefs and attitudes, often reflecting 'social liberalism', shaped by recent political debates and events.

Further, Kluegel and Smith contend that since social inequality is an important part of the social world and an important influence on individuals' lives, it is a frequent area of individual thought and attention, and emphasize that people attempt to understand the general causes of inequality and structure their attitudes and actions according to the causal understanding they achieve. Within their model, people are likely to ask questions about social inequality in two basic forms: How should the stratification system work, and how does it actually work? These questions relate to what influences economic reward, whether or not inequality is an inevitable feature of society, and what costs and benefits result from inequality. Regarding the stratification system, the following questions tend to arise: Is there true equality of opportunity for all groups? Are the typical incomes of different occupations proportional to their contributions to society?

The contention that our society provides available answers to these questions, in the form of what is called the 'dominant ideology', was presented by Huber and Form (1973), Gerbner et al. (1979) and others. The dominant ideology itself and the general individualistic bias in the culture of the US have been acknowledged by many investigators (e.g. Feagin, 1975; Huber and Form, 1973; Kluegel and Smith, 1983; Weber, 1959). Wealth is seen as the result of superior individual effort and talent and poverty as the product of deficiencies in these areas.

The dominant ideology entails three beliefs. First, it assumes that opportunity for economic advancement is widespread in America today. Second, it maintains that individuals are personally responsible for their positions. Third, it concludes that the overall system of inequality is, therefore, equitable and fair (Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Ryan, 1981).

This dominant ideology is also referred to as the Fair Play perspective (see Ryan, 1981). Its overwhelming popularity is attributed to its being associated with two persuasive notions: the time-honored principle of distributive justice and the cherished image of the US as the land of opportunity. This perspective stresses the individual's right to pursue happiness and obtain resources. This way of viewing the phenomenon of equality emphasizes that each person should be equally free from all but the slightest interference with his or her right to pursue happiness. Moreover, the emphasis is placed on being equally free to 'pursue', but without guarantees of 'attaining', happiness. This perspective is in contrast to a competing one, namely, the Fair Shares perspective. This alternative perspective

holds that the right of access to resources is a necessary condition for equal rights to life, liberty and happiness.

According to Ryan (1981: 9), as compared with the Fair Play perspective, Fair Shares concerns itself much more with equality of rights and of access, particularly the implicit right to a reasonable share of society's resources, sufficient to sustain life at a decent standard of humanity. While de-emphasizing the focus on the individual's pursuit of his or her own happiness, the advocates of Fair Shares are committed to the principle that all members of the society obtain a reasonable portion of the goods that society produces.

Several processes have been identified as supporting the dominant ideology, but in our conceptualization we specify three broad categories. We assume that an individual's location in the social structure has a detectable influence on various social outcomes. Communication, as represented by mass media and interpersonal discussion of societal issues, has the major influence and group identification supplies the boundaries and the context of this influence.

The mass media, and especially television, have been credited with providing important interpretations of social reality (Allen and Taylor, 1985; Allen et al., 1989; Gray, 1987). Gerbner et al. (1980, 1984), proponents of the cultivation analysis perspective, maintain that television provides, perhaps for the first time since preindustrial religion, a strong cultural link, a shared daily ritual of highly compelling and informative content between the elites and all other publics (Gerber et al., 1984: 102). Basically, they argue that television makes specific and measurable contributions to viewers' conceptions of reality. These contributions relate both to the synthetic world television presents and to viewers' real life circumstances. The basic premise is that television's images cultivate the dominant tendencies of a culture's beliefs, ideologies and world views. This theoretical framework holds that not only does television have an influence on various beliefs and ideologies, but that the influence will in many instances develop in socially undesirable directions. While it is frequently noted that the effects of the mass media often vary by medium and to some degree by the outcome under investigation, typically greater impact is attributed to television. But just as the different media may have notably different effects, we argue here that different content in the same medium will often have different effects (see Salomon, 1984, for an elaboration on the differential effects of the mass media and mass media content).

Although a great deal of what we know comes from the media, interpersonal discussion of societal issues and mass media exposure is conceptualized as input in the symbolic representation of what we perceive to be reality. Thus, this symbolic reality is assumed to influence how we will interpret things in our environment. In addition to seeking information conveyed by mass media channels, which may not always be accessible, individuals depend on others to bring them news and offer them normative social guidelines. We assume that the discussion of societal issues will encourage the normative mainstream values about equality and sensitize

the individual to issues related to inequality. The form of the discussion of societal issues will generally encourage the dominant ideology, but it may also crystallize the issues. Since the implementation of the dominant ideology perpetuates inequality (Huber and Form, 1973; Sears and Kinder, 1985; Smith and Kluegel, 1984), it is assumed that individuals through discussion find it unacceptable, thus choose its alternative. That is, through these discussions the individuals may be reminded of the 'American Creed', namely the equality of basic human, legal, political and economic rights.

Location in the social structure

The dominant ideology, it appears, is supported by widespread individual experiences of certain concrete aspects of recent American history. The majority of Americans have experienced improvement upon their parents' standard of living (Kluegel and Smith, 1982). Even those who have not benefited directly have evidence from friends or family members that demonstrates this mobility. People tend to generalize relatively benign personal economic experiences to conclude that mobility is possible for anyone who works hard (Lane, 1962). The manner in which personal experiences dispose people to accept societal inequalities has been emphasized by proponents of such theses as the demise of working-class consciousness, the 'embourgeoisement' of the working class and the 'end of ideology'.

With the unequal distribution of economic rewards, simple self-interest inevitably produces conflicting beliefs and attitudes. One would expect the privileged to hold beliefs that support and legitimate the stratification system that benefits them, and the less privileged to adopt challenging beliefs which would provide grounds for changes that might bring increased benefits (Chesler, 1976). Members of middle-income groups confront a quite complex situation, as they simultaneously see the potential for economic improvements and for economic losses from changes in the stratification system. That is, middle-income groups might be expected to maintain certain beliefs that support the existing system and others that challenge it.

A number of studies (e.g. Feagin, 1975; Gurin et al., 1980) have noted the lack of strong sociodemographic differences in predicting determinants of certain belief structures. Kluegel and Smith (1981) speculate that this may be due to the pervasive influence of the American ideology of individualism.

Our hypotheses, which employ social structural measures to predict equality outcomes, are the combination of two contending principles—the 'underdog' principle and the principle of 'enlightenment'. The former contends that those who rank low in the stratification order will be more likely to see economic redistribution (and other notions of distributive justice) aimed at equality as just. The latter maintains that the more educated, or more generally those with more information, will be more likely to see

such redistribution as just (Kluegel and Smith, 1981). When we predict the determinants of general structured equality, we employed the underdog principle; however, when we predict the determinants of structural racial equality, we employed the enlightenment principle, since it is assumed that the more educated would be more inclined to understanding the complex issues and practical barriers to reaching racial equality.

In addition to the aspects of social identity mentioned above (e.g. class and race), religion may have played some part in the development of either a more conservative or prejudicial or a more tolerant attitude towards a variety of social issues including structural inequality and racial intolerance. Previous studies have yielded evidence indicating that religious affiliation and church attendance were positively associated with conservative and traditional attitudes toward morality (Crider, 1977; Josefowitz and Marjoribanks, 1978; Willits et al., 1977). On the other hand, more complex curvilinear relationships have been noted between church attendance and racial intolerance—the non-attender and the nuclear attenders tend to be more tolerant than the nominal attenders (Burnham et al., 1969). Later, Petropoulos (1979) replicated the non-linear trend finding and reported that the overall trend was positive, namely with the most frequent church attenders showing the greatest tolerance toward both African-Americans and Jews. Furthermore, his study replicated the early observation that a positive correlation exists between orthodoxy and racial prejudice.

Based on the results from several studies (Glock and Stark, 1966; Gorsuch and Aleshire, 1974; Hoge and Carrol, 1973; Thompson et al., 1970), the relationship between religion and prejudice is not only a function of the type of religiosity (fundamentalist, orthodoxy, etc.), but also a function of the social conformity of the nominal attenders to the white Anglo-Saxon tradition of prejudice. The non-religious and the highly religious select their values from outside this tradition, whereas the nominal religious groups tend to conform to this tradition of prejudice.

People may come to see aspects of their social identity, such as class, race or ethnic group, as being connected to their group memberships (Tajfel, 1982). Group identification may lead to two types of effective response that under certain conditions can influence responses to inequality: identification or solidarity with an in-group and hostility to an out-group (Kluegel and Smith, 1986). The sense of sharing a common fate and interests with others is accorded a key role in generating class consciousness and action for social change among the working class. Class identification among the privileged, conversely, would be important in producing organized action in support of the status quo (Kluegel and Smith, 1983).

As Kluegel and Smith (1986) argued, the growth of social liberalism has increased perceptions of the need for government programs in general, and the dominant ideology shapes the specific type of program that will be acceptable to the public. Policies that can be easily seen as consistent with the dominant ideology have often met with popular acceptance (e.g. access to public accommodations and schools for racial minorities, social security benefits for the aged, equal political rights). These rights are entirely

consistent with an ideology of individualism and can be seen as offering individuals an equal starting point in the meritocratic competition for economic success. Besides, the dominant ideology fosters the elimination of discrimination and other such obstacles to opportunity for basic reasons of self-interest.

Alternatively, policies that challenge aspects of the dominant ideology have usually met with less popular acceptance. Social welfare must not weaken the motivation to work hard; affirmative-action programs (as distinct from simple equal opportunity) have been perceived as the call for equal outcomes and hence as violating the necessary relationship between inputs (hard work) and outcomes (Glazer, 1975). Individual solutions to social problems, those aimed at changing characteristics of the individuals blamed for the problem, will be more acceptable than structural solutions that involve changes to societal or institutional arrangements. The dominant ideology leads to opposition of structural solutions because they challenge the ultimate inevitability and desirability of economic inequality.

Theoretical definitions

Two constructs are used to explore whites' belief about opportunity: one is general and abstract, the other is more concrete and relates to a specific group, namely African-Americans. Both call for institutional change in reducing inequality. General structural equality is defined as the belief that suggests that barriers to opportunity should be eliminated by institutional or societal means without reference to any specific group. This conception of equality is compatible with the Fair Shares perspective we outlined earlier.

Structural racial inequality is defined as the belief that employing societal or institutional measures to solve problems of racial inequality is not appropriate. Such measures could include changing the distribution of authority in the workplace, reducing income differentials between occupations and promoting more equality of ownership or control over wealth. This definition is attuned to the dominant ideology in its consequences and reflects the Fair Play perspective. That is, it endorses the individual's right to life, liberty and happiness, but negates the use of resources to bring this equality into being.

Structural equality solutions are conceived as incompatible with the dominant ideology since they challenge the ultimate inevitability and desirability of economic inequality (Kluegel and Smith, 1986). Given the history of race relations in the US, the challenge of obtaining racial equality through structural means is even more pronounced.

Mass media exposure involves choosing between messages and activities. Attending to the mass media, then, means being in a situation in which a decision is made to watch, read or listen instead of engaging primarily in some other activity. We distinguish between two media, television and newspapers, but explore the same content type—news.

Interpersonal discussion is defined as the amount of verbal exchange an

individual has with family and friends about a number of societal issues. While this construct includes, conceptually, the quality and nature of such discussion, the limitations reflect only the quality of the discussion of political issues, empirically considered.

Education, income and perceived social class comprise our three most direct indicators of the social structural dimension. Education is used here as a proxy for cognitive complexity and indicates the amount and variety of information to which an individual is exposed. Family income is viewed as the availability of material resources that may be used to pursue a range of options. Perceived social class reflects an individual's self-determined class placement. It is intended to demonstrate class identification.

The other exogenous, variables are age, religiosity and church attendance. Age is defined as an experiential variable, reflecting the amount of societal influences possible; religiosity as the cognitive attachment to religious principles; and church attendance as a behavioral manifestation of religious affiliation.

Hypotheses

From our theoretical formulation, which embodies several important assumptions, and our definition of key constructs, the following eleven hypotheses are presented.

- H1:* Those who attend more to television news and those who attend more to newspapers are more likely to engage in the interpersonal discussion of political issues.
- H2:* The more the television news exposure, the more the endorsement of structural racial inequality.
- H3:* Those who engage more in the discussion of political issues are more likely to endorse general structural equality but are less likely to endorse notions of structural racial inequality.
- H4:* Those with a stronger conception of general structural equality will be less likely to endorse notions of structural racial inequality.
- H5:* Those of an older age, those with a higher perceived social class and those of higher incomes will attend more often to the news on television.
- H6:* Those of an older age, those with more education, those with a higher perceived class and those of a higher income are more likely to read the newspaper.
- H7:* Those who are older and those of a higher education will engage more often in the discussion of political issues.
- H8:* Those who are younger, those of less education, those of less income and those of a lower perceived social class are more likely to endorse general structural equality.
- H9:* Those who are younger, those with more education, those who attend church more often and those who consider themselves religious are less likely to endorse structural notions of racial inequality.
- H10:* Those who perceive themselves to be religious will show a greater

racial prejudice as manifested in their favorable attitudes towards structural racial inequality.

H11: Those who attend churches more frequently will show more racial tolerance as manifested in having a less favorable attitude towards structural racial inequality.

RESEARCH METHODS

The data used in our analysis are a subset from the 1988 National Election Survey (NES) data set collected by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. The 1988 NES is based on a multistage area probability sample from the Survey Research Center's (SRC) national sample design. The sample respondents were selected following a four-stage sampling process: a primary stage sampling of US Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) and counties; a second stage of sampling of area segments; a third stage sampling of housing units within sampled area segments; and, finally, the random selection of a single respondent from selected housing units. A detailed documentation of the SRC national sample is provided in the SRC publication *1980 SRC National Sample: Design and Development*.

The completed interview sample size for the 1988 NES pre- and post-election was 2040. For this study only the white subsample was used in this analysis ($n = 1698$).

Measures

Social structural variables. The reported age was measured at the last birthday. Education was measured by the number of years of education completed. Perceived social class was measured by responses to several questions that asked individuals to specify whether they identified most with upper, upper-middle, middle, lower-middle or lower class. Then a summary measure was constructed and used in the actual analysis. Income was a summary of the respondent's total family income from all sources.

Religiosity was measured by a single indicator, asking the respondents to report 'how important religion is in your life'. Church attendance was measured by a single indicator, asking the respondents how often she or he went to church. Religiosity and church attendance are expected to be positively correlated with each other. Nevertheless, the authors chose to treat them as two separate constructs because findings from earlier research have indicated that they may affect people in varying ways in terms of their social attitudes.

Communication processes. Since this is a secondary analysis, we had to accommodate our work to some extent to what was available in the data set in selecting variables for the analyses. Only a few questions regarding mass media exposure and communication were asked in the 1988 NES. Some

media exposure variables involving exposure to campaigning activities were too specific for our purposes. We chose to use more global and general media exposure and communication variables. As a result we had to use single indicators for the three media and communication variables.

Television news exposure was measured by an indicator asking respondents: 'How many days per week do you watch news on television?' Newspaper news exposure was measured by an indicator asking respondents: 'How many days per week do you read newspapers?' Interpersonal discussion was also measured by a single indicator, asking people: 'How many days per week do you talk about politics with family or friends?'

Equality indicators. Belief in structural equality was measured by three indicators.² Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: (1) our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed; (2) if people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems; (3) one of the big problems in this country is that we don't give everyone an equal chance. The measurement items were coded in a way such that high scores indicate greater structural equality.

Belief in structural racial equality was also measured by three indicators.³ Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: (1) blacks should do the same as other groups without any special favors; (2) if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites; (3) it is not the government's job to guarantee equal opportunity for blacks. The measurement items were coded in such a way that high scores indicated a stronger endorsement of structural racial inequality.

The causal model

In order to examine the independent as well as the joint effects of mass media exposure, interpersonal discussion and various social structural variables on the development of people's beliefs about two versions of equality, a causal model was proposed and tested using the Linear Structural Relationship (LISREL) covariance analysis. The theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

Two media exposure variables—television news exposure (η_1) and newspaper news exposure (η_2)—and one interpersonal discussion variable (η_3) were included in the model as our primary explanatory variables. Our outcome variables—general structural equality and structural racial inequality—are reflected by multiple indicators.

In using the LISREL covariance analysis, several assumptions are implied. First, since the Maximum Likelihood Method is used in estimating parameters, it is assumed that the observed indicators have no excessive kurtosis. Second, the residuals (ζ s) are assumed to be uncorrelated with the exogenous latent variables (ξ s). And third, the measurement errors (ϵ)

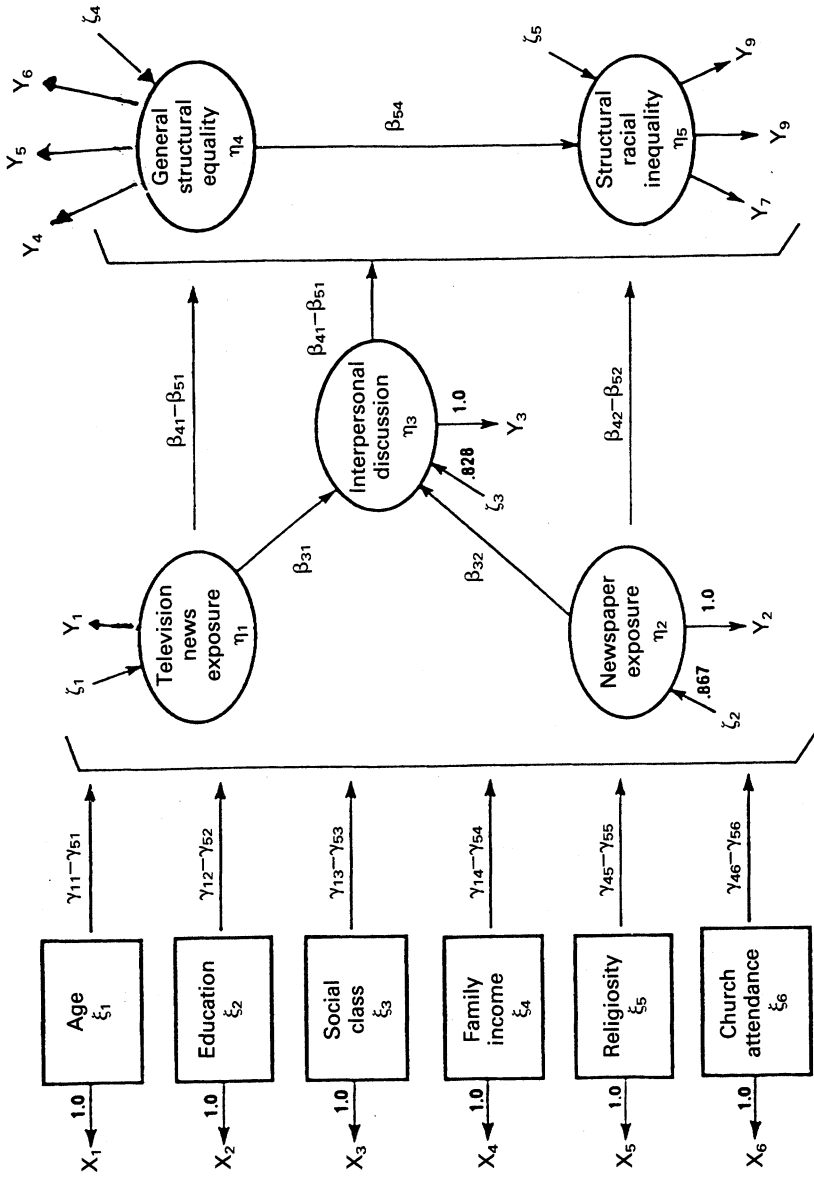


FIGURE 1. Theoretical model of structural equality

are assumed to be independent from ξ s, η s and ζ s but may correlate among themselves (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1984).

RESULTS

Several measures were used to assess the goodness-of-fit of the models because a consensus has not emerged on which measure is the best one (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Bollen, 1989). The first one was a χ^2 measure that assessed the probability that the observed covariance matrices could have been generated by the hypothesis model. The smaller the χ^2 , the better the overall fit. It should be noted that there are advantages and disadvantages to using the χ^2 test as a summary measure of model fit. When the sample size is fairly large, the covariance matrix is analyzed, the observed variables have no excessive kurtosis, and the null hypothesis is true, the $(N-1)F_{ML}$ is a good approximation to a χ^2 variable suitable for tests of statistical significance. On the other hand, if at least one of the above conditions is violated, then the χ^2 test loses some of its value (see Bollen, 1989).

The first measure to be examined is the χ^2 divided by its degrees of freedom ($\chi^2/d.f.$). By convention, a ratio of 3 or less has been construed to be an acceptable fit (Carmines and McIver, 1981). Our estimate was 2.720.

Joreskog and Sorbom (1988) devised a Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) and an Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI). The GFI measures the relative amount of variance and covariance explained by a model. In most cases, the values range from 0 to 1, and the AGFI adjusts for the degrees of freedom relative to the number of variables. Both reward sample models with fewer parameters. A GFI of .990 and an AGFI of .975 were found for the proposed model, thus indicating a good fit.

Another goodness-of-fit index, proposed by Bentler and Bonett (1980), is called the Normed Fit Index. It shows the improvement achieved by a proposed theoretical specification over the null model that assumes no causal linkage among the variables. This measure, presumably, is not affected by sample size, although the claim is questioned (e.g. Bollen, 1989). We obtained a value of .967, representing a good fit.

Bollen (1989) proposes a new incremental fit index which adjusts Bentler and Bonett's Normed Fit Index for sample size and the degrees of freedom of the maintained model. Again, we obtained an estimate suggesting a good fit (.979).

A final measure of fit employed is the Critical N (CN) developed by Hoelter (1983). This measure assesses the fit of a model relative to an identical hypothesized model estimated with different sample sizes. Although no consensus exists for determining the magnitude of CN, Hoelter suggested that a CN greater than 200 for a single group indicates that a particular model adequately reproduces an observed covariance structure. The CN for this model is 842.

The standardized and unstandardized LISREL estimates are presented

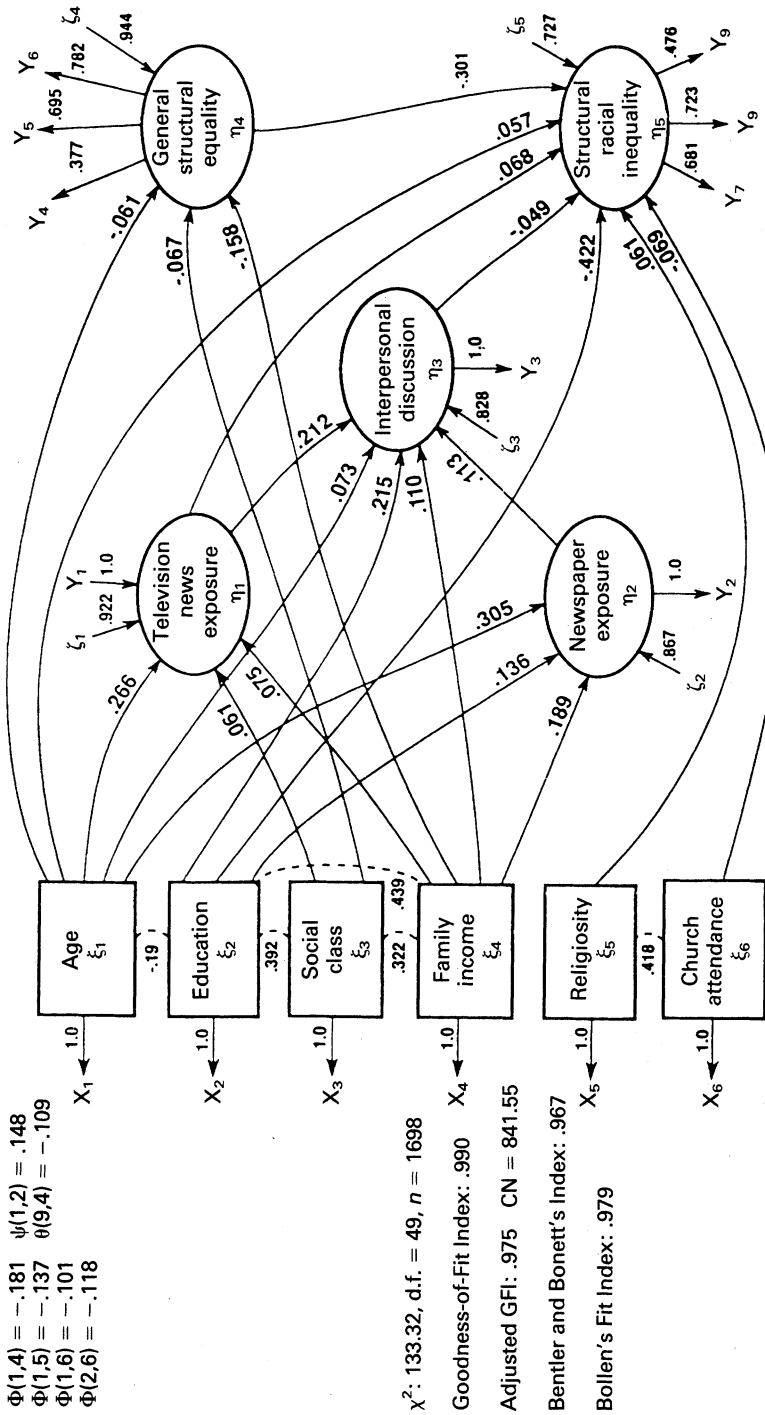


FIGURE 2. Statistically significant standardized estimates for structural equality model

TABLE 1. Parameter estimates for structural equality model

Parameter	Unstandardized estimates	Standardized estimates
ψ_4	1.000	.377
ψ_5	2.377	.695
ψ_6	2.916	.782
ψ_7	1.000	.681
ψ_8	1.149	.723
ψ_9	.836	.476
β_{31}	.201	.212
β_{51}	.020	.068
β_{32}	.095	.113
β_{53}	-.015	-.049
β_{54}	-.670	-.301
γ_{11}	.039	.266
γ_{21}	.051	.305
γ_{31}	.010	.073
γ_{41}	-.001	-.061
γ_{51}	.002	.057
γ_{22}	.242	.136
γ_{32}	.321	.215
γ_{52}	-.192	-.422
γ_{13}	.091	.061
γ_{43}	-.013	-.067
γ_{14}	.033	.075
γ_{24}	.094	.189
γ_{34}	.045	.110
γ_{44}	-.009	-.158
γ_{55}	.027	.061
γ_{56}	-.036	-.069
ψ_{11}	6.374	.922
ψ_{22}	7.683	.867
ψ_{33}	5.132	.828
ψ_{44}	.110	.944
ψ_{55}	.419	.727
ψ_{12}	1.157	.148
ϵ_{44}	.698	.851
ϵ_{55}	.702	.517
ϵ_{66}	.629	.389
ϵ_{77}	.665	.536
ϵ_{88}	.693	.477
ϵ_{99}	1.376	.776
ϵ_{94}	-.131	-.109

in Table 1, and the statistically significant standardized parameter estimates together with various goodness-of-fit indices are presented in Figure 2.

The measurement part of the solution is adequate. There were no improper solutions or negative error variances. A significant correlated error was found between two indicators (Y_9 and Y_4). After examining the contents of the two indicators, the authors decided that the correlated

error did make sense conceptually since they both concern the implementation of egalitarian policy. The former one (Y_4) asserts that the society should do whatever to assure equal opportunity for everyone; whereas, the latter one (Y_9) contends that it is not the government's responsibility to guarantee equal opportunity for blacks. The correlated error is $-.109$.

In summary, the overall fit measures indicated a good model fit. Moreover, the measurement aspect of our model suggested that the multiple indicator constructs were reliable, with loadings within constructs being fairly similar.

After examining the measurement part, we now move to the parameter estimates on the latent variable model. Hypothesis 1 received full support. Those who watched more television news and those who read more newspapers were more likely to engage in interpersonal discussion of societal issues. Both effects were fairly small ($\beta = .212$ and $\beta = .113$, respectively).

Hypothesis 2 predicts a positive relationship between television news and structural racial inequality. That is, it maintains that those who watch more television are more likely to endorse structural racial inequality. Although the effect was small ($\beta = .068$), the hypothesis was supported.

Those who engaged more in the discussion of societal issues were less likely to endorse notions of structural racial inequality as predicted (hypothesis 3), but there was no relationship of interpersonal discussion on general structural equality.

Hypothesis 4 was supported. A fairly strong statistically significant relationship was found between the two equality constructs ($\beta = -.301$). Those who agreed with structural solutions to equality in general terms were also more likely to accept the notion of structural solutions to racial inequality.

Hypothesis 5 which predicted age, perceived social class and income to be positively related to television news exposure was fully supported. The effect of perceived social class and income was much smaller, however, than the relationship of age ($\gamma = .061$ and $\gamma = .075$ vs $\gamma = .266$).

Turning to the newspaper construct, hypothesis 6 specifies the same relationship as the above hypothesis, but includes the education construct. With the exception of the perceived social class construct, the hypothesis was supported; age showed the strongest relationship ($\gamma = .305$) and education and income were also statistically significant.

As we predicted in hypothesis 7, the older and those of higher education were more likely to discuss societal issues. Not predicted, but specified, income also had a small positive relationship on interpersonal discussion.

Hypothesis 8 (for the most part a combination of the underdog principle and the enlightenment principle, plus age) received partial support. The younger, those of less income and those of a lower perceived social class were more likely to agree with a structural solution to equality. Education showed no relationship.

Hypothesis 9 (the enlightenment principle plus age and the religious variables) was only partially supported. That is, those with more education ($\gamma = .422$) and those who attend church more often ($\gamma = -.069$) were more

likely to agree with structural solutions to racial inequality. On the other hand, those who were older and those who scored high on the religiosity measure were more likely to accept structural racial inequality. These relationships were quite small ($\gamma = .057$ and $\gamma = .061$).

The two hypotheses regarding religiosity and church attendance both received empirical support in this study. Those who reported having a higher level of religiosity tended to endorse racial inequality ($\gamma = .061$). The magnitude of the path coefficient is small, but it is statistically significant. This finding squares with the early finding that orthodoxy was positively related to racial prejudice. On the contrary, church attendance was found to reduce such endorsement toward racial inequality ($\gamma = -.069$). In other words, heavy church attenders indeed showed greater tolerance than nominal attenders.

CONCLUSIONS

A central aspect of our conceptualization was the assumption that a dominant ideology, which emphasizes an individualistic interpretation, provides the basis upon which Americans respond to issues of equality. Based upon this assumption, we formulated the direction of our hypotheses. Our results generally supported the explanation for whites' beliefs about two different forms of structural equality. As it turned out, the communication processes had powerful effects. Both television news and newspaper exposure had influences on the discussion of societal issues. Whereas, newspaper exposure had no effect on our equality construct, television news exposure, as predicted by the cultivation hypothesis, did. The relationship was such that attention to television news produced a less favorable response to structural solutions to racial inequality. This finding is compatible with the individualistic orientation that is embodied in the dominant ideology, and the Fair Play perspective, at least as it pertains to blacks. Interestingly, this television construct showed no relationship with the general structural equality construct. Interpersonal discussion of societal issues had an effect on the structural racial equality construct. Those who discussed societal issues more often tended to endorse structural solutions to inequality or what is described as the Fair Shares perspective. Finally, in formulating our model we assumed that a more general, non-racial conception of equality would influence the conception of equality in specific instances or with respect to specific groups. Although it is possible to embrace general notions concerning the implementation of means to ensure equality for the population as a whole, but not embrace these structural means as it applies to a specific group, in this case African-Americans. We, however, theorized the opposite effect. We maintained that by having a broader, abstract notion of structural equality, this would lead to the endorsement of structural solutions for ensuring racial equality. This hypothesis received support.

The constructs reflecting location in the social structure overall had small

but predicted effects. For example, the effects to these variables on the media variables suggest that the older and those better placed in the social system are more likely to attend to the news. Conversely, younger people and those who were less well placed tended to endorse general notions of resolving inequality by structural means. Thus, the underdog principle seems to hold sway with respect to the acceptance of structural solutions to issues of inequality. With respect to the race-specific construct of equality, a quite different picture emerges. Whereas, those with more education and those who attend church more often were more likely to embrace structural solutions to racial inequality (the enlightenment principle), those of an older age and those who considered themselves to be more religious were more accepting of structural inequality.

The relationship of our two religious constructs is quite intriguing. On the one hand, those who attended church more often endorsed the notion of structural solutions to racial inequality problems. On the other hand, those who considered themselves more religious did not seem to endorse this notion. The results indicate that a distinctly different picture of the effect of religion on racial inequality will emerge, depending on which construct of religion you use. While one might offer many speculations about the meaning of these relationships, we have decided to pursue formally some of the alternative explanations in a subsequent study, designed to tease out some of the relevant factors.

Our research directly addresses the issue of contemporary beliefs of whites towards important notions of equality/inequality, and the findings suggest that a significant portion of the white population—the young, the educated, those with less income, indeed the majority—seems to embrace structural change notions of equality as they relate to African-Americans. Whether these beliefs translate into pushing for such changes or whether these elements have the power to do so is another question. For policy-makers, knowing that a substantial element of the population holds particular beliefs may be important by itself. It may have an influence on decisions that they must make concerning equality or the lack thereof in American society.

In future research, it would be useful to have multiple indicators of our predictor constructs, since we know that one-indicator constructs are notoriously unreliable and, thus, might influence the magnitude of relationships (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Although we have provided multiple indicators of each of our equality constructs, more reliable measures need to be included. Further, a wider range of equality constructs would be revealing. Our simultaneous examination of several equality constructs, or belief stratification conceptions, within a single study might highlight the complexity and multidimensional form of equality and the differential responses to these different constructs.

It would be useful to study African-Americans' conceptions of the equality constructs we explored as well as the others that we have suggested. Relatedly, an extension of these ideas might be conducted within a comparative framework.

Finally, although our theoretical formulation was supported empirically, structural variations of this model would be explored across important subgroups such as gender, generation and geography. Our work is a modest attempt to add to the existing fund of knowledge in this area.

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NOTES

1. As some scholars have pointed out (Reich, 1981; Ryan, 1981) racial minorities receive less than their share of benefits from many programs, including social security and unemployment compensation, and even less of the benefits of public higher education or weapon procurement. The government cutbacks and the turn to recessionary aggregate economic policies have hurt African-Americans and other oppressed racial minorities as well as most working-class and middle-class whites.
2. These items represent either an identification or resolution of problems associated with equity and justice. They have often been used as operationalizations of constructs associated with redistributive policy or distributive justice.
3. A similar set of items has been used to represent various affirmative action or equal opportunity policies.

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