

Duke University

Department of Sociology

GRADUATE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

August 29, 2005 – August 30, 2005

This examination has three sections. You must answer questions I and II. In Part III, you may select any one question. Your answers should be as complete as possible. They should not exceed a total of fifteen (15) double-spaced pages, excluding the references. You should follow a journal format (e.g., American Sociological Review) for references and citations. You have 24 hours from the time you receive your exam to return it to Claudette Parker as an email attachment.

No discussion of any Qualifying Examination with any other person is permitted until after September 2, 2005, when all examinations have been completed.

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Answer BOTH Questions I and II.

I. Consider three broad perspectives in sociological social psychology: (1) social structure and personality, (2) symbolic interactionism, and (3) group process (experimental sociological social psychology). Select one of these metatheoretical traditions; then select a specific theory within that tradition. First, state the central premises and propositions of that theory. Second, critically evaluate the theory (e.g., what are its strengths and weaknesses, how well does it fit the criteria generally used to evaluate theories). Third, select an article that you believe does a good job of articulating and testing the theory. Provide a brief synopsis of the study and a rationale for your choice.

II.

Theories must share a lot of common assumptions to generate competing hypotheses. There are two areas in sociological social psychology where this condition appears to be met: structural symbolic interactionism (where Heise's affect control theory and Burke's identity control theory share much common ground) and exchange theory (where Emerson's power-dependence theory and Willer's network exchange theory share a basic structure). Select one of these contrasts (or propose another one of your own choosing). Outline the assumptions and propositions that the two theories share. Where do they offer competing hypotheses? Choose one of the hypotheses that distinguish the two theories, and design a study to test it. (This should be the most detailed part of your answer.) We recognize that the study design cannot be detailed, but provide basic information on sampling, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation.

Answer one of the following questions (III-VI).

III. Nowhere has the debate about structure and agency raged more fiercely than in social psychology. Choose two theories that take very different positions on this debate, and outline their arguments. Do their theoretical positions determine the typical methods used within the theoretical traditions? Explain why or why not.

- IV. Few social psychological characteristics or behaviors are evenly distributed across socio-demographic space. Ecological theorists have labeled this clumping of characteristics “niches.” Outline the processes that would lead such niches to form. What types of social entities are likely to form niches, given the processes that you have outlined? (Cite literature to support your observations, when possible.) Choose one social psychological characteristic that has *not* been studied by ecological theorists, and make an argument why you would hypothesize it would display a niche pattern.
- V. There has been much argument over the years about the extent to which (a) Blumer is representing Mead’s original theoretical ideas, and (b) Goffman is a symbolic interactionist. Choose one of these debates, choose a side and write a short essay arguing for your stated position. Use both the original theoretical writings and the later research programs that developed from them where these are relevant to your arguments.
- VI. Homophily is a very commonly observed social structure. Define the term, and very briefly review the literature that finds homophily on different social characteristics and in different types of relationships. Is homophily the result of social structural forces or the result of individuals’ choices about interaction partners?