THE REAPPROPRIATION OF STIGMATIZING LABELS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

We present a model of reappropriation, the phenomenon whereby a stigmatized group revalues an externally imposed negative label by self-consciously referring to itself in terms of that label. The model specifies the causes and consequences of reappropriation as well as the essential conditions necessary for reappropriation to be effective. To place the concept of reappropriation in proper context, we begin by discussing the roots of stigma and the mediating role played by social categorization and social identity in the realization of stigma's deleterious effects. We also discuss the strategies available to both individuals and groups by which stigmatized individuals can enhance their devalued social identities. We provide a discussion of two historical cases of reappropriation and some preliminary empirical evidence concerning the consequences of self-labeling and attempting to reappropriate a stigmatizing label. Finally we discuss the implications of the model for groups and teams, both within and outside of organizations.

INTRODUCTION

> There is a lot of pain in being a geek. When I first started using the name, it started to fit and at the same time empower. Calling myself a geek was saying to all the people who sometimes made me feel tortured, or isolated, or defeated, "I don't care if you think I'm a two-headed freak. I think I'm better than you and smarter than you, and that is all that matters" (*Rolling Stone*, April 29, 1999, p. 48).

While there is perhaps a lot of pain in being a "geek," there is just as much, if not more, pain in being *called* a "geek." Being labeled a "geek" signifies that one is a member of a stigmatized out-group, someone who is not worthy of respect. Being labeled as such can serve to strengthen and justify inequities in status, keeping the labeled person in a subordinate position.

The behavioral response to the label "geek" described by the individual above suggests one potential way out of this dilemma. He began using the derogatory label on himself, for himself. In effect, he reappropriated the label from those who sought to derogate him, turning a hurtful term into a badge of pride. Given that to appropriate means "to take possession of or make use of exclusively for oneself," we consider *reappropriate* to mean *to take possession for oneself that which was once possessed by another*, and we use it to refer to the phenomenon whereby a stigmatized group revalues an externally imposed negative label by self-consciously referring to itself in terms of that label. Instead of passively accepting the negative connotative meanings of the label, the speaker above rejected those damaging meanings and through reappropriation imbued the label with positive connotations. By reappropriating this negative label, he sought to renegotiate the meaning of the word, changing it from something hurtful to something empowering. His actions imply two assumptions that are critical to reappropriation. First, names are powerful, and second, the meanings of names are subject to change and can be negotiated and renegotiated.

It is important to investigate the use of labels, both by self and by others, because it helps to shed light on the construction, maintenance, and alteration of social identity. Indeed, the use of labels has profound consequences for the self-esteem of groups and their members. Moreover, labels and their connotative meanings also provide the social perceiver with a means to easily parse the social environment, serving as an information-processing lens for interpreting and integrating social information. The mere presence of a group label can activate stereotypic information about the group (Devine, 1989; Lepore & Brown, 1997), and information consistent with these activated connotative meanings of labels is more easily processed, assimilated, and integrated into memory and is thus also more likely to be retrieved in the future (Stangor & McMillan, 1992). Labels, and the categories to which they refer, serve as guiding themes and organizing principles, and they help us to interpret the meaning not only of social information but also of our social identities.

1   The nature of stigmatizing labels, and the prospects for successfully deflect-
2   ing stigma through reappropriation, must be understood in the broader context
3   of social and self-categorization as well as social identity. As such, we begin
4   by discussing the cognitive and motivational benefits of categorization. We then
5   turn to the causes and consequences of stigma and the mediating role of social
6   identity. Next, we focus on strategies, both individual and group, that stigmatized
7   persons can use to deal with their devalued social identity. We present reappro-
8   priation as one such strategy and place its use in the context of social identity
9   and collective action. We propose a model of reappropriation that discusses its
10 causes and consequences, and the essential conditions we believe to be necessary
11 for reappropriation to be effective. We claim that reappropriation is possible be-
12 cause stigma is malleable and the meaning of labels is contextually sensitive. In
13 discussing the causes and consequences of reappropriation, we suggest that there
14 are many reciprocal processes involved in reappropriation; several variables that
15 increase the likelihood of reappropriation (e.g. collective self-esteem) will also be
16 augmented following successful reappropriation. Thus, reappropriation can both
17 be a cause and marker of elevated group status. Finally we provide not only a
18 discussion of two historical cases of reappropriation, but also some preliminary
19 predictions and empirical examples of the consequences of self-labeling, of trans-
20 forming the links between labels and attributes. We end the chapter with a look
21 at some of the implications of our model of reappropriation for work groups and
22 teams.
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25 **SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION AND SOCIAL IDENTITY**
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27 Categorization is an integral part of mental life (Allport, 1954; Bruner, 1957;
28 Lippmann, 1922). Categorization helps us makes sense of the social environment
29 and it allows us to simplify and organize our perceptions (Bruner, 1957; Fiske
30 & Taylor, 1991; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). A second but no less important
31 function of categorization is that it allows us to successfully regulate our behav-
32 ior within the social environment (Bodenhausen, Macrae & Hugenberg, in press;
33 Verkuyten & Hagendoorn, 1998). Each social category to which we belong has
34 a number of beliefs, norms, and behaviors bound up with that category (Turner,
35 Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994), which can be activated through the categoriza-
36 tion of the self and others (Marques, Abrams, Paez & Martinez-Taboada, 1998).
37 A third function of social categorization is to help us understand our position or
38 place within the social environment. In the words of Tajfel and Turner (1986,
39 p. 16), social categorizations "create and define the individual's place in society."
40 Categorization allows us to compare our own groups to the groups of others and to
    know the consensual value of these groups. Thus, social categorization allows us

not only to parse the environment and to act effectively within it but also to gain an understanding of how our own social groups relate to other groups.

From these functions of social categorization, Tajfel and Turner (1986) proposed social identity theory based on the assumption that self-esteem is affected by membership in social groups. One's social identity is the part of one's self-concept that derives from group memberships; it is the groups that the person identifies with or to which the person is socially recognized as belonging (Rosenberg, 1979; Turner, 1987). The implications of group membership for self-esteem are contingent upon the positive or negative evaluation of the group in relation to other groups; thus, social identity is inherently relational, relative, and comparative (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

When one is a member of a consensually valued group, such as an ethnic majority or a culturally valued profession, one should derive positive self-esteem from membership in that group. Conversely, when one is a part of a group that is derogated by the dominant culture, self-esteem should suffer. This idea that self-esteem is partially dependent on the perceptions and views of others is consistent with the theories of the "looking-glass self" (Cooley, 1902) and reflected appraisals (Mead, 1934), both of which state that conceptions of the self are highly dependent on others' appraisals of oneself. We come to know how valued our social identities are by the reactions those identities elicit from others.

Because social identity contributes to an individual's self-esteem, individuals are motivated to find ways in which to view their group memberships in a positive light. In fact, group members try to positively differentiate the in-group from similar out-groups on relevant dimensions of comparison in an attempt to enhance group distinctiveness. This form of bolstering, called positive distinctiveness, can be maintained through exaggerated affection for the in-group or condemnations of out-groups. Derogation and stigmatization of others therefore can arise in the service of enhancing social identities (Fein & Spencer, 1997; Mullen & Johnson, 1993).

SOCIAL STIGMA

Stigma, according to Goffman, is an attribute that discredits and reduces the person "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Social stigma links a negatively valued attribute to a social identity or group membership. Stigma is said to exist when individuals "possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context" (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998, p. 505). Given these criteria, there are myriad groups in our own culture that tend to be

considered stigmatized. Ethnic minorities, such as African Americans or Native Americans, persons with physical or mental disabilities, gay men and lesbians, and the obese can all be considered stigmatized groups. To be stigmatized often means to be economically disadvantaged, to be the target of negative stereotypes, and to be rejected interpersonally (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa & Major, 1998). Name-calling (Smythe & Seidman, 1957) may be a favorite strategy for calling forth these harmful sequelae of stigma.

Predicaments of Stigma and Its Situational Nature

Being stigmatized carries with it a number of burdens. First and foremost, stigmatized persons are disadvantaged in terms of opportunities they are afforded and the outcomes that they achieve. Overt and covert prejudice and discrimination can deny the stigmatized entry into elite stations in life, from education to jobs to housing (e.g. Bordieri & Drehmer, 1986; Webber & Orcutt, 1984). Beyond these disparate outcomes, the negative reactions and evaluations of others can limit the ability of the stigmatized to evaluate themselves positively and can reduce a sense of self-integrity or wholeness. Indeed, this devaluing treatment leads to a number of powerful psychological predicaments that can further impair their ability to succeed by decreasing their performance (Steele, 1997) and by reducing the diagnosticity of performance-related feedback (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker et al., 1991).

Even when overt discrimination does not produce unequal outcomes, stigmatization can lead to decrements in performance through a process of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat occurs when individuals are worried about confirming a negative stereotype about their social group or being judged in terms of the group stereotype in a particular context (Steele, 1997). This phenomenon occurs when particular attributes are linked to expected outcomes in performance contexts. Stereotype threat effects generalize across a wide variety of social groups and performance contexts, including African Americans and low-economic-status Caucasians in general intellectual domains (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Steele & Aronson, 1995), women in math (Spencer, Steele & Quinn, 1999), women in negotiations (Kray, Galinsky & Thompson, in press; Kray, Thompson & Galinsky, 2001), and Caucasians in athletics (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling & Darley, 1999). Stereotype threat is a situational threat, dependent on the context and the framing of the performance task. The concern provoked by stereotype threat is not just that one will confirm the stereotype but that this confirmation will further reify the stereotype, placing increased burden and constraint on the groups' striving for positive regard and distinctiveness.

Stigma, like categorization (Wittenbrink, Judd & Park, 2001) and stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), is context-dependent (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998). Thus, an individual may be stigmatized in one context but not in another context. In different cultures and in different times, groups such as the overweight or gays have not been burdened with stigma. Instead, these features are or were considered normal, or, in some cases, desirable (Archer, 1985). Intellectual ambition may be lauded in one context (e.g. classroom) but derided in another context (e.g. fraternity) or by another group (e.g. disadvantaged inner city youths). It is the variability of stigma that intrigues us. It suggests that what is considered stigmatizing is socially constructed and, in the end, malleable. In the case of stereotype threat, a social category label takes on negative connotations within a particular context. One approach to decreasing stereotype threat, and thereby to reduce the potentially performance-constraining effects of stigma, is to frame the task as non-diagnostic of underlying ability (Steele & Aronson, 1995). An alternative approach, which is the focus of this chapter, is to transform the connotative meaning of the traits that are linked to the social category, revaluing them positively. Reappropriation, typically in the form of self-labeling, is one strategy that attempts to revalue social identities. Reappropriation and other socially creative strategies are possible because of the situational, socially constructed, and thus malleable nature of stigma.

SOCIAL STIGMA AND ACHIEVING POSITIVE SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Given that stigmatized groups are subjected to overt and covert discrimination and to performance deficits arising from stereotype threat processes, what mechanisms for deflecting the negative impact of stigma might group members have at their disposal? Several theories predict that members of stigmatized groups should suffer a decrement in self-esteem as a consequence of their membership in those groups. However, this is not necessarily the case. A variety of responses and strategies can help buffer against the sting of stigma, successfully defending one's self esteem from the frontal assault of devaluation (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

One set of strategies was referred to by Tajfel and Turner (1986) as "individual mobility." One obvious means for an individual to avoid the stigma of group membership is simply to *leave the group*. Many groups to which we belong, however, may be difficult or impossible to leave – they are ascribed to and imposed upon us. In this case, individual mobility may be achieved by *reducing the importance of the group* for one's own individual identity, thereby *psychologically distancing* oneself

from the stigmatized group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In other cases, membership in a stigmatized group may be ascribed, but difficult to ascertain by others. Thus, one can attempt to *conceal the stigma* and deny membership in the stigmatized group. Remaining "in the closet" is therefore one means by which some gay men and lesbians avoid being derogated personally. However, concealable stigmas can often be discovered, and not every stigma can be concealed (e.g. skin color or body size). In fact, derogatory labels are probably maximally effective when directed at someone who seeks to keep the potentially stigmatizing identification hidden. If leaving or disidentifying with the group is impossible or too radical, another means of reducing the impact of stigma is also to *disidentify with the dimension* upon which the group is stigmatized or stereotyped. For example, Steele (1997) claims that, over time, African Americans come to devalue and disidentify with school performance, and women disidentify with advanced quantitative areas, due to the stigmatization of their groups on these dimensions.

All of these individual strategies for dealing with stigma, while effective in attaining or maintaining positive self-esteem, pose significant motivational problems for the stigmatized individual. Perhaps the most damaging problem is that these strategies can undermine motivation to seek social change. Leaving the group, psychologically diminishing the importance of the group, or concealing group membership can prevent the group from collectively appreciating the systematic nature of the injustice that the group endures. Without collective acknowledgement of discrimination, it becomes difficult to effect social change as a group (Wright, 2001). As such, it is important to note that even if these strategies succeed in reducing the sting of stigma for some individuals, they are not a viable solution for the group as a whole to reduce the stigma connected with membership in that group.

Group-based strategies for dealing with stigma attempt not merely to minimize the damning implications of stigma, but to transform and enhance the way the group is treated and evaluated. One option is social competition, which involves acting in a coordinated manner against an out-group in an attempt to reverse the relative positions of the in-group and the out-group on culturally valued dimensions (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In a stable social hierarchy, however, social competition is a difficult means of achieving positive distinctiveness with hegemonic out-groups.

SOCIAL CREATIVITY: THE ROOTS OF REAPPROPRIATION

Social creativity is an alternative means to overt competition for overcoming the negative implications of stigma. Through the creative use of

1   categorization and social comparisons, groups attempt to positively revalue at-
2   tributes that previously had been considered negative (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).
3   Instead of leaving the group (either physically or psychologically) or resorting
4   to hostile competition, social creativity allows group members to improve the
5   consensual value of their group by changing the way in which the group is
6   perceived and judged by the stigmatized in-group or by the culture at large, or
7   both.
8   One method of social creativity is to restrict comparisons to others within the
9   stigmatized in-group, thereby avoiding painful upward social comparisons with
10 out-group members. By using standards based only on the in-group, an individual
11 from a disadvantaged group can feel relatively advantaged. A woman, for example,
12 may consider herself to be well paid in the context of other women, whereas she
13 might not do so in the intergroup context of both men and women (Blanton, George
14 & Crocker, 2001). Another creative approach is to try to defend against the typical
15 implications of social comparisons by comparing the in-group to the out-group
16 on a dimension on which the in-group is actually advantaged (Jackson, Sullivan,
17 Harnish & Hodge, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; van Knippenberg & van Oers,
18 1984). Thus, given the stereotypes that African Americans are less intelligent but
19 more athletic than Caucasians (Stone et al., 1999), African Americans can choose
20 to compare themselves to Caucasians along the dimensions of athleticism and may
21 begin to value and nurture those abilities. By shifting the attributes of comparison,
22 a stigmatized individual can take advantage of the comparative nature of social
23 identity.
24   Via social creativity, the stigmatized group attempts to change the overall value
25 assigned to it. This is often accomplished by changing those dimensions on which
26 the group bases its identity. Other times, the group may attempt to alter the
27 value assigned to its particular attributes. We believe that this revaluing process
28 is at the core of the reappropriation of a stigmatizing group label. By taking a
29 negatively evaluated label, and revaluing it positively, a group can change the
30 value of the label and thus, in at least some important ways, the value of the
31 group. As Tajfel and Turner (1986) note, the "Black is Beautiful" movement is a
32 quintessential example of this revaluing process. This movement sought to change
33 the connotative meaning of the group label "Black" and in doing so also sought
34 to change the value of being a member of that social category. At the heart of
35 this process of confronting and defusing the negative implications of a deroga-
36 tory group label exists some fundamental questions about the nature of mean-
37 ing inherent in language. In order to understand the reappropriation process it
38 is thus necessary to first consider the way in which words take on connotative
39 meanings.
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DOUBLE MEANING: CONNOTATIVE VERSUS DENOTATIVE MEANINGS OF WORDS

Words frequently have associations to referents other than the direct, definitional, denotative meaning of the term. For example, "warm" and "cold" not only denote variations in temperature, but also connote variations in personality traits such as friendliness. Valence of the connotative and denotative referents often corresponds reasonably well; a warm environment and a warm person are both pleasant to experience. However, they can diverge. For example, *welfare* no longer elicits the same evaluations as the apparently synonymous phrase *assistance to the underprivileged*. In a series of survey experiments, Smith (1987) found that people declared far more support for social spending when the survey questions were phrased using the latter as opposed to the former label. Not only has welfare come to connote bureaucracy and waste, but it has also become racialized, referring to assistance to a specific, stigmatized group, African Americans, rather than to the full body of Americans.

Exactly the same phenomenon can apply to labels for persons and social groups. Given that groups can use stigmatizing labels against others to reinforce and boost their own social identity, dominant groups may choose labels for stigmatized groups that are comparatively derogatory. Writing in the midst of feminist consciousness-raising, Lerner (1976) discussed the preference on the part of men to use *girl* rather than woman, a connotative preference that both expresses and reinforces the power differential between the sexes. Manipulating connotative meanings in this way serves several purposes for the non-stigmatized, including preserving a sense of superiority. For example, using labels against stigmatized others allows individuals to disassociate themselves from the stigmatized person(s) (Kurzban & Leary, 2001).

The way that labels can take on connotative meaning based on social contexts is demonstrated poignantly in the lesson in prejudice taught by Jane Elliott, an Iowa schoolteacher, in her third grade classroom (see Peters, 1987). In this exercise Elliott separated the students into two classes of individuals based on the color of their eyes. The blue eyed students were made the advantaged caste, getting more recess time, access to the water fountain, and second helpings of food. The phrase "brown eyes," – an insignificant and neutral physical marker only the day before – was transformed into a label seething with hostile evaluation. When the teacher asked a student after recess why he hit another student, the boy replied "Because he called me brown eyes." Upon being asked what he thought the student meant by calling him that name, he replied: "That I'm stupid." The label, "brown eyes," had become linked to the trait stupidity such that the mere mention of the label activated

the negative attribute. The stigmatized students with brown eyes were made to feel devalued when their lower station was articulated through the contemptuous use of that label. For individuals and groups faced with prejudice, tackling the negative connotations of group labels may be a means of addressing prejudice itself.

OVERCOMING NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS: LINGUISTIC ROUTES TO INCREASED STATUS

How should groups respond to stigmatizing labels? One possibility is that the individual or group could simply choose to ignore the label, asserting that words, unlike sticks and stones, cannot in themselves do harm. Selective devaluation of dimensions on which the group fares poorly, mentioned earlier, can be seen as a variant on this theme. However, it may often be hard for members of disadvantaged groups to ignore the hurtful intentions that lurk beneath the deployment of intergroup slurs by their relatively powerful, advantaged counterparts. Further, it may be difficult to devalue some dimensions, especially those that are prized by the culture at large.

A second avenue for combating the negative implications of derogatory labels is to change the way in which one self-labels, by deciding to use a different label altogether to refer to oneself or one's group. Using this strategy, one re-labels, rather than reappropriates an existing label. This is particularly attractive for situations in which a name or label develops negative connotations only over time, and where label change can be accomplished legally. For example, airlines that have high-profile crashes have sometimes changed the name of their companies in order to distance themselves from the association with fatality: USAir changed its name to USAirways and Valujet changed its name to AirTran. One political example is the British right-of-center party that changed its name from "Tory" to "Conservative" after major electoral reform in 1832 threatened its ability to command a majority in future elections. Even individuals will change their names and seek to dissociate from their disreputable past. Jeff Gilloley, the man who orchestrated the attack on skater Nancy Kerrigan during the Olympic trials, legally changed his name to Jeff Stone. The change from "Colored" to "Negro" and then "Black" were attempts to reject the slave owners' terminology, to break with the position of enslavement (Smith, 1992).

One problem with changing one's name is that renaming acknowledges that the negativity associated with the word is unlikely to change and raises the possibility that the negative attributes are legitimate and justifiably applied. In addition, the stigma-reducing scope of renaming can be inherently limited because it does not oblige non-group members to follow suit. Re-naming might achieve little

1   connotative change unless the stigmatized group itself has increased in status (i.e.
2   the denotative evaluation improved). As Evan Kemp of the Disability Rights Cen-
3   ter observed, "As long as a group is ostracized or otherwise demeaned, whatever
4   name is used to designate that group will eventually take on the demeaning flavor
5   and have to be replaced" (Raspberry, 1989, p. 19). Thus, re-naming may not always
6   be successful in reducing the impact of stigma on group members.

REAPPROPRIATION

11 An alternative route to increased intergroup status that does not have the potential
12 pitfalls of ignoring a stigmatizing label or attempting to construct a new label is
13 to revalue and reappropriate an existing label. By this we mean the phenomenon
14 whereby an ostracized group revalues an externally imposed negative label or
15 symbol by self-consciously referring to itself in terms of that label or symbol. For
16 example, some African Americans have begun to refer to other African Ameri-
17 cans using the word "nigger." One argument in favor of this particular reappro-
18 priation is that "the more a black person uses the "N" word, the less offensive it
19 becomes." They claim that they are "cleansing the word of its negative connotations
20 so that racists can no longer use it to hurt blacks" (Hutchinson, 2001, p. 1). That
21 is, self-labeling defuses the impact of derisive terms by making the name more
22 commonplace.
23   Another example would be the emergence in the 1990s of "queer" as a self-label
24 for proud gay men and lesbians, a label that previously had been a deliberate and
25 resented epithet. Similarly, many gay rights organizations use the symbol of the
26 pink triangle, a symbol used in Nazi Germany to identify gays, to promote aware-
27 ness of discrimination against gays. A marking mechanism that had been used as
28 a device of discrimination was transformed into a tool of tolerance, a symbol of
29 pride and self-acceptance. This kind of self-labeling has several potentially positive
30 consequences. The historically negative connotations of the label are challenged
31 by the proud, positive connotations implied by a group's use of the term as a self-
32 label. Where "queer" had connoted undesirable abnormality, by the fact that it is
33 used by the group to refer to itself, it comes to connote pride in the groups' unique
34 characteristics. Where before it referred to despised distinctiveness, it now refers
35 to celebrated distinctiveness. Reappropriation allows the label's seemingly stable
36 meaning to be open to negotiation.
37   In addition, the defiant act of reappropriation may attack the negative evaluations
38 of the denoted group. By refusing to perceive "queer" as demeaning, in-group
39 members make it more difficult for out-group members to gain recognition for
40 their own display of superiority, thereby undermining one of the functions of

1 prejudice (Fein & Spencer, 1997). The ability of reappropriation to deprive out-
2 group members of a linguistic weapon is nicely exemplified in an episode of *The*
3 *Simpsons*. In this episode, Homer becomes angry with a gay character for using
4 the word queer to describe himself, yelling "And another thing. You can't use the
5 word queer . . . that is *our* word for you." This example emphasizes that implicit in
6 the concept of reappropriation is the idea that language is an ongoing process of
7 negotiation, a power struggle over the connotative meaning of symbolic referents.
8 As such, self-labeling can serve to diffuse the negative connotations of the word.
9 Further, by reclaiming names formerly soaked in derision, an individual exerts his
10 or her agency and proclaims his or her rejection of the presumed moral order.
11   In successful reappropriation, an alternative vision is presented that does not
12 necessarily change the underlying denotative meaning of a concept but transforms
13 the connotative evaluative implications. In the case of "queer," reappropriation
14 implies that deviance or abnormality is itself not necessarily a bad thing, thereby
15 promoting a celebration of diversity. Through reappropriation, the implication of
16 distinctiveness in the term "queer" was not disputed or challenged, but rather
17 the evaluative meaning that it connoted was transformed. Via reappropriation,
18 the group asserts that it is still unique, or exceptional, but that exceptionality is
19 positively valued. The distinctiveness of the group and the label is maintained, but
20 it is simply the negativity that is challenged.
21   In many ways, the collective, social creativity method of reappropriating and
22 revaluing the negatively connoted group label is free of many problems that char-
23 acterize the individual self-esteem maintenance methods. Perhaps most important,
24 reappropriating a negative group label and changing its connotative meaning is a
25 solution for the entire group to maintain and enhance positive self-esteem. If the
26 very meaning of the group label has changed in a positive direction, this may allow
27 people formerly ashamed of their group memberships to take pride in them, while
28 simultaneously robbing name-callers of a previously potent weapon of interper-
29 sonal hostility. In addition, reappropriation can be used as a tool in intergroup
30 relations when the reappropriating group is using a term that the majority groups
31 would be socially sanctioned for using. For example, the use of the word "nigger"
32 by a majority group member causes immediate social sanction.
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35   **TWO REAL-WORLD ACTS OF REAPPROPRIATION**
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37 As previously discussed, two interesting and culturally significant cases of reappro-
38 priation are the use of the label "queer" by members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual,
39 and transgendered community and the use of the label "nigger" by members of the
40 African-American community. We believe that an investigation of the similarities

1 and differences between these two acts of reappropriation can shed light on the
2 nature of the phenomenon as a whole. While a thorough treatment of this subject
3 is beyond the scope of this work, we will deal with some very clear parallels and
4 divergences between how groups may have reappropriated these two labels.
5   In some important ways, the self-labeling with "queer" and "nigger" have
6 parallel histories. While the first uses of "queer" and "nigger" by members of
7 the in-group likely have much longer histories than do their use in the public
8 sphere, their initial uses by individuals as a political statement can be marked. In
9 one of the first public acts of individual reappropriation, Dick Gregory, a renowned
10 African American comedian-cum-activist entitled his 1964 autobiography "Nig-
11 ger." In his dedication to the book, he claimed he used this title so that if his mom
12 heard the word she would know that it could be referring to his book and not to a
13 label designed to be demeaning. A decade later, Richard Pryor used "nigger" in his
14 stand up comedy routine. Similarly, in the late 1980s, a gay and lesbian publication
15 *Outweek* began using the word "queer" to refer to the increasingly activist gay,
16 lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community. It was from these and similar acts
17 of individual self-labeling that the process of reappropriation began.
18   It should be noted that the reappropriation of both "queer" and "nigger" has met,
19 and still decades later continues to meet, resistance from within the stigmatized
20 groups. In a recent article, Gabriel Rotello (2000), one of the first *Outweek* authors
21 and editors to use the label "queer," observes that the use of queer as an in-group
22 label was, and still is hotly debated. Similarly, the use of the label "nigger" to self-
23 label by members of the African American community is certainly not approved
24 by all members of the community. Gayle Tiller, Vice President of the San Jose
25 NAACP, considers it to be a derogatory word that is offensive to African Americans.
26 In addition, both Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor later disavowed the use of word
27 "nigger" and called for the African American community to abandon using it.
28   While there are parallels, "queer" and "nigger" are used very differently by both
29 the stigmatized minority groups and by the culture at large. "Queer" activists have
30 not only used "queer" as a self-referential label, but have also endeavored to make
31 it part of the national dialog about sexual preference. In 1990, a new activist group
32 formed by four members of ACT-UP dubbed itself Queer Nation and, with the
33 slogan "We're here. We're Queer. Get used to it!" sought to make the label queer
34 not just acceptable, but accepted as a title for – and to bring attention to the plight
35 of – gay men and lesbians.
36   In contrast to "queer," the label "nigger" has not been used by activist groups in
37 an attempt to revalue the word in the culture at large. Instead, "nigger" has become
38 reappropriated only within a subset of the African American community. Perhaps
39 spurred by its use in popular media such as film and music (Allen-Taylor, 1998), the
40 use of the word "nigger," like the word "queer," has become more commonplace.

1   There is, however, a clear difference in the intended use of the labels "queer" and
2   "nigger." Whereas "queer" was meant to highlight not only positive distinctiveness
3   but also inclusiveness, "nigger" has been used for the purposes of exclusiveness.
4   "Nigger" is often used as a sign of affection within the African American com-
5   munity, but its use is denied to those outside this community. Whereas gay and
6   lesbian activists have sought to popularize the use of "queer" in society at large, the
7   use of the label "nigger" has remained possessive and territorialized. Despite the
8   fact that the activists such as Gregory sought to bring the word "nigger" into the
9   national dialogue about ethnicity, its proprietary use has restricted open commu-
10 nication across ethnic boundaries. Its use by many African Americans is a defiant
11 demonstration of ownership, epitomizing what African Americans' possess and
12 what is deprived to a range of out-groups.
13   For a reappropriated label to achieve consensual acceptance, recognizing that
14 the label possesses positive connotations and implications, the group may often
15 first have to acquire increased status. The differential use of the word "queer" and
16 "nigger" may be representative of this relationship between status and reappropri-
17 ation. The gay and lesbian community has achieved a number of political gains
18 that have included protection against discrimination in housing and employment,
19 both at the local and federal level in the United States. The sharing of the label may
20 represent increases in status. Earlier we mentioned the example of the *Simpsons*
21 in which Homer is frustrated that he can no longer use the word queer derisively
22 because the gay community has reappropriated its use through self-labeling. At
23 the beginning, the self-labeling use of a negative label may be the only form of
24 power a group has against a hegemonic and oppressive majority, especially when
25 the majority is denied use of the label. Using a label self-referentially, especially
26 when its use is denied to others, can be a form of power, even if only a symbolic
27 and linguistic one. Thus individuals who identify with and are identified as con-
28 nected to the African American community, such as Jennifer Lopez, can be labeled
29 as racist for using "nigger" self-referentially (Hutchinson, 2001). The proprietary
30 use of the label may appear to be a relatively impotent form of defiance, but it may
31 inspire and motivate individuals to attempt to exact social change.
32   By using a label only within the in-group, perhaps the most powerful positive
33 outcome would be an increased sense of in-group affiliation and cohesion. In this
34 case, the in-group has essentially "reclaimed" something not formerly theirs and
35 it now holds exclusive rights to its (politically correct) use. It gives members of
36 the in-group a shared attribute that members of other groups do not have, thereby
37 increasing positive distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991; White & Langer, 1999). More-
38 over, when reappropriation remains only an in-group phenomenon, the label can
39 still take on positive connotations. For example, "nigger" not only implies in-group
40 affection, but also suggests that that negative stereotypic traits, such as hostility,

can be revalued to mean toughness, honor, and loyalty. Further, by reappropriating a label for the in-group only and refusing to approve its use by out-groups, the stigmatized group exerts control over the use of the label in the public sphere, thereby increasing feelings of agency. In fact, increased feelings of agency and control can often lead individuals towards action. Thus, oppressed groups often take collective action only once their situation has begun to improve (Crosby, 1982; Martin, 1986).

However, by forbidding its use in the general population, when used by an out-group member, the label may actually come to be *more* hurtful. Not only would an out-group member be calling up all of the oppressive connotations of the label, but he or she is also explicitly defying the will of the stigmatized group. Thus, the threat when a majority member uses the word may be magnified. This is not to say that the use of the word "nigger" should be commonplace, but only to point out that only when a reappropriated word is allowed to be articulated by both the in-group and the out-group will the word truly become revalued.

It appears that the labels "queer" and "nigger" have achieved different levels of reappropriation. Reappropriation designed for and limited to the in-group will have a constellation of effects different from reappropriation that achieves acceptance in the culture at large. In the next section we present a model of reappropriation that takes these differences into account.

A MODEL OF REAPPROPRIATION: FACILITATING AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF REAPPROPRIATION

Given that reappropriation of a stigmatizing label can provide a group with an opportunity to defuse its negative connotations and to revalue it positively, what are the conditions that promote reappropriation? And what are the consequences of reappropriation for both the reappropriating group and for the non-stigmatized groups? In this section we discuss simultaneously both the conditions that facilitate and the consequences of reappropriation, in the hopes of establishing a model of reappropriation that will be useful in guiding future research (see Fig. 1). We believe a positive feedback loop exists that can lead to accelerated changes in social standing, such that a variable that enables reappropriation may itself be reciprocally affected and strengthened once reappropriation occurs. For example, the cohesiveness of a stigmatized group may predict whether reappropriation occurs, but once it does, the group may become even more cohesive. Similarly, reappropriation may not just be a cause of elevated standing but can also serve as a marker of higher status. This claim is similar to the view that self-esteem itself does not necessarily lead individuals to achieve better outcomes and ultimately higher status but rather
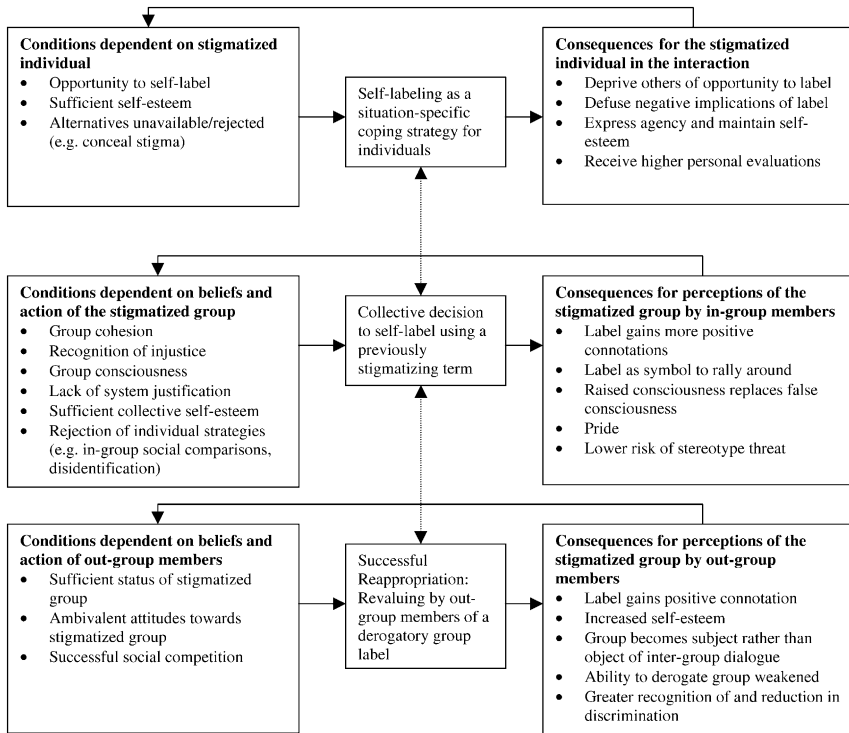
Fig. 1. Model of reappropriation, divided into three levels. Level 1 represents reappropriation in its most minimal form, a situation in which an individual self-labels as way of dealing with a potentially threatening interpersonal situation. Level 2 represents a collective decision by the stigmatized group to self-label in an attempt to revalue a stigmatizing label. Level 3 represents successful reappropriation in which members of out-groups accept the revaluing (the new connotative meaning of the label). Positive feedback loops exist at each level; the consequences of self-labeling and reappropriation will often affect the conditions necessary for self-labeling and reappropriation to take place in the first place. The dotted double-headed arrows connecting the three levels reflect their interdependence with one another. An individual who self-labels makes it conceivable and possible for the group to collectively decide to self-label, which then makes it more likely that an individual may choose to do so.

serves as a marker of status (Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs, 1995); changes in self-esteem alert the individual to changes in social standing. In this way, reappropriation may be a historical marker for when the status of a group starts to shift upwards.

1   We have discussed thus far a multitude of negative consequences of having stig-
2 matizing labels applied to oneself and one's group. However, stigmatizing labels,
3 even labels that are laden with negative connotations, can carry value to an indi-
4 vidual. Membership in minority groups, for example, can be rewarding because
5 individuals and groups are not just concerned with relative standing but are also
6 concerned with relative distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991; White & Langer, 1999).
7 In fact, when the sense of distinctiveness of individuals is threatened, minority
8 membership, even when the minority group is stigmatized, is valued more than
9 membership in a majority group (Brewer, Manzi & Shaw, 1993). Minority groups
10 may show hostility towards similar, more mainstream minority groups because
11 these groups threaten the advantages of distinctiveness that stigma provides and
12 threaten valued group boundaries (White & Langer, 2001). For example, African
13 Americans may resent biracial individuals because they feel (though not neces-
14 sarily accurately) that biracial individuals get the advantages of being distinct
15 without all of the negative repercussions of being more distant from the main-
16 stream. In actuality, biracial individuals can get the worst (exclusion from both
17 groups) rather than the best (distinctiveness without stigma) of both the majority
18 and minority worlds. Reappropriation may therefore have additional benefits than
19 simply revaluing positively a stigmatizing label. Reappropriation may allow the
20 stigmatized to maintain and even augment their sense of distinctiveness. Reappro-
21 priation can enable individuals and groups to maximize both relative status and
22 relative distinctiveness.

25 *Self-labeling: The Building Blocks of Transformation of Stigmatizing Labels*

27 In the model presented in Fig. 1, we have dissected both the causes and conse-
28 quences of reappropriation, creating three levels. At the most basic level is the
29 individual's decision, independent of a collective decision, to self-label using a
30 potentially derogatory label. The examples of Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor
31 described above represent the first level of our model of reappropriation: two defi-
32 ant acts of individuals using an epithet to self-label. Such individual self-labeling
33 can often be used in potentially threatening interpersonal situations. When an in-
34 dividual self-labels, the power of a negative label may only be diffused and not
35 necessarily transformed to connote a positive implication. Some of the conditions
36 promoting this strategy are that the individual typically must not be capable of con-
37 cealing the stigma, and the person needs an opportunity to self-label. A very simple
38 example is the situation in which someone trips and stumbles in the presence of a
39 group of people. The person who tripped may first check to see if everyone failed
40 to notice and if so, then the clumsiness is concealable. If others noticed, the person

1 may decide not to do anything. In this case, if another person points and proclaims
2 the person to be a klutz, the individual is trapped in the negative implications
3 of the word, in a position of weakness. However, if the person self-consciously
4 refers to him- or herself using the label "klutz," then the negative implications
5 of the label may be limited and its potential power to affect self-esteem defused.
6 Self-labeling is potentially risky because it may draw attention to the stigmatizing
7 behavior. Thus, sufficient self-esteem may be required because an individual has
8 to be able to feel confident that the negative connotation will not stick through
9 self-labeling.
10   The potential consequences of self-labeling in this minimal manner, first and
11 foremost, are that another individual has been denied the opportunity to use the
12 label as a weapon, and thus the negative implications of the label may be de-
13 fused. Self-labeling may increase a sense of agency and control of the world,
14 thereby increasing both self-efficacy and self-esteem. In addition, there may be
15 interpersonal benefits of self-labeling. We suggest that observers' views of the
16 individual who trips are most negative and most label-centered (i.e. think about
17 the person in terms of the label) when the target tries to evade the label. In con-
18 trast, we predict that observers will have a more positive impression of a tripper
19 who self-labels with the potentially derogatory word. The more beneficent im-
20 pressions caused by self-labeling may result from a number of interpretations:
21 that the person does not take him or herself too seriously, has a high degree of
22 self-confidence, that the term is used ironically and implies that the opposite is
23 generally true, etc. Finally, from the foundation of defusing the label, there is the
24 possibility that the word could start to take on positive connotations, although
25 this may require repeated occurrences and ultimately a concerted effort by a
26 collective.

Collective Decision to Reappropriate

31 From the lone individual self-labeling comes the possibility that a stigmatized
32 group may collectively decide to self-label using the previously stigmatizing term,
33 with the hope of infusing the label with positive connotations. This collective de-
34 cision represents the second level of reappropriation in the model presented in
35 Fig. 1. Once the collective decision to self-label has been undertaken, there exists
36 the possibility that widespread reappropriation will be successful. This represents
37 the third level of the model: a situation when the out-groups that had previously stig-
38 matized the group now acknowledge the newly developed positive connotations.
39 The variables associated with the collective decision to self-label and ultimately to
40 reappropriate the label would also appear to be similar to those that moderate the

effects of stigma on individuals. Crocker et al. (1998) suggest that there are myriad variables that help determine the level of distress that a stigmatized individual will feel: ideology (particularly those that legitimate their subjugated status), beliefs about personal responsibility, the acceptance of negative stereotypes, etc. Each one of these variables may also predict whether a member of a stigmatized group feels comfortable using a reappropriated label. In looking at the variables that influence and may be influenced by reappropriation, we focus on group cohesion, self-esteem, the current and directional movement of the social standing of the group, and finally how reappropriation may reduce some of the predicaments that the members of stigmatized groups face.

Group Cohesion

Reappropriation may be more likely to occur when group cohesion is high, but it is also likely to increase that same feeling of cohesion, a state of mutual support and solidarity along with the perception that the group is a tightly knit, self-contained entity. A prerequisite for cohesiveness, and likely reappropriation, is that the boundaries between groups must be relatively impermeable (e.g. Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, van Knippenberg, de Vries & Wilke, 1988). Thus, there must be either structural or physical barriers in place such that it becomes difficult either to leave one's stigmatized group or to join another group. Indeed, as long as even a small percentage of the stigmatized group is permitted to join a higher-status group, most people will continue to rely on individual strategies to enhance self-esteem (Wright, Taylor & Moghaddam, 1990). As such, strict impermeability prevents individual mobility, leaving individuals to focus on collective action.

Cohesiveness leads individuals to focus on salient characteristics and use them to define the group; such groups tend to focus on invariant similarities among members of the group, reducing the importance of individual differences (Dasgupta, Banaji & Abelson, 1999). Consequently, highly salient stigmas may increase the cohesiveness of a group. On the other hand, achieving success and obtaining higher status increase group cohesiveness (Evans & Dion, 1991). These contradictory influences suggest that when the standing of a stigmatized group starts to increase, group cohesion should also increase. That is, because both stigma and status increase cohesion, when a group is both stigmatized and starting to achieve increased status, cohesion should be maximized because it is drawing on these two contradictory sources of cohesion simultaneously. This increase in group cohesion could then pave the way for reappropriation, for a transformation of the connotative meanings of the group label both by the stigmatized group and by out-groups.

Perceptions of Injustice and Group Consciousness

For reappropriation of a negative label to affect change for all members of a group, it must be fundamentally a group phenomenon. Reappropriation of a negative group label may only occur if individual strategies do not suffice to maintain self-esteem, making the individuals more dependent on changing the standing and perceptions of the group in order to bolster self-esteem. In addition, for collective action to occur, let alone succeed, individuals must identify with the group in question. Identification with the group, accepting it as a central part of one's social identities, allows individuals to experience the feeling of deprivation as a group rather than as an individual phenomenon (Ellemers, Wilke & Van Knippenberg, 1993). Gurin and Epps (1975) suggest that group consciousness, possibly essential for a group label to be reappropriated, requires recognition that stigmatization is a group-level, or social, phenomenon and not just an individual experience. Thus, the motivation to take collective action should be minimized if in-group comparisons lead to an inability to perceive systemic injustices or if ascribing negative outcomes to the stigma leads to a feeling of helplessness. Indeed, for this collective action to take place, there must be a perception of unfair deprivation (e.g. Dion, 1986) or distributive and procedural injustice (Tyler & Smith, 1998).

Group consciousness may not only be necessary for reappropriation to occur, but reappropriation may also provide groups with a label around which to rally, raising consciousness even further. In this way, reappropriation may be inversely related to the justification of current social hierarchies. System justification refers to psychological processes by stigmatized individuals that promote existing social arrangements even when those arrangements harm their personal and group outcomes. Thus, many stereotypic beliefs are consensual, shared by both the advantaged and disadvantaged groups. As Jost and Banaji (1994) point out, buying into and even protecting a system that subjugates one's group is an example of false consciousness. Moving from being labeled to self-consciously self-labeling may occur contemporaneously to moving from false to raised consciousness. On its surface, self-labeling could appear to be consistent with system justification tendencies: using the very name as self-descriptive that those higher in the status hierarchy have used to subjugate stigmatized individuals. But reappropriation does not accept or use the negative, stigmatizing label at face value. Instead, the act of reappropriation attempts to alter the links between the label and attributes, severing the link to negative attributes and melding links to positive attributes. Thus, reappropriation might occur for those low in system justification beliefs, or social dominance orientation (Sidanius, 1993) and might serve to decrease those beliefs. Reappropriating and revaluing a negative, stigmatizing label positively

1 challenges rather than legitimizes existing social arrangements and their systematic
2 inequalities.
3
4
5 *Reducing Disabling Effects of Stigma on Performance and Interaction*
6
7 Fear of being seen as typical of the negative characteristics of a stigmatized group
8 can lead to stereotype threat and performance decrements (Steele, 1997). When
9 the group is revalued positively, then these performance decrements can dissipate.
10 In the "blue eyes, brown eyes" example mentioned earlier, the stigmatized brown
11 eyed children, who wore a collar around their necks identifying their deviant eye
12 color, took 5.5 minutes to complete a word task. The next day when they were
13 liberated from the suffocating hold of the stigmatizing label, their performance
14 dramatically improved, completing the task in 2.5 minutes. Stigma disables per-
15 formance because it absorbs cognitive resources (Lord & Saenz, 1985); stigmatized
16 individuals are conscious of and think about their stigmatizing qualities. In fact,
17 the stigmatized brown-eyed elementary school children were well aware of this
18 effect. When the teacher asked why they had done poorly the day before, they
19 said because they were thinking about their collars, that the collars attracted their
20 attention and distracted them from the task at hand. Freed from having to worry
21 about the stigma, and living down to its expectations and implications, reappropri-
22 ation enables individuals to direct their full attention towards accomplishing tasks,
23 thereby increasing performance. The effect of eliminating the negative implica-
24 tions of stigma on performance has implications for the productivity of individuals
25 and teams within organizations that will be discussed in the final section of the
26 paper.
27
28
29 *Self-esteem: Individual and Collective*
30
31 The reduction in negative evaluations afforded by reappropriation could have pos-
32 itive powerful effects on the self-esteem of members of stigmatized groups. Cer-
33 tainly, it is important that one values one's in-group in order to maintain self-esteem.
34 Thus, even if reappropriation only succeeds in changing evaluations within the in-
35 group (the second level of the model), positive self-esteem could result. Simply
36 avoiding the negative evaluation of the self that could arise from the activation of a
37 stigmatizing label could be an important step toward maintaining self-esteem. The
38 benefits of reappropriation, however, would appear to be even more powerful if the
39 culture at large accepts the new socially created connotation of the reappropriated
40 label (the third level in the model). If the label changes meanings and valences,

1 from negative to positive, allowing the culture as a whole to revalue the group, the
2 benefits to self-esteem from being a member of a culturally valued group could be
3 enormous.
4
5
6   *Cultural Reevaluation of the Stigmatized Group*
7
8 The ultimate and desired consequence of reappropriation is cultural reevaluation of
9 the stigmatized group as a whole, the third level in our model. That is, groups that
10 formerly derided the stigmatized group acknowledge the evaluative transformation
11 from negative to positive.
12   As has become clear in recent years, there are powerful positive and negative
13 associations connected to the labels of many groups in our culture (Banaji, 2001;
14 Devine, 1989; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998). In fact, mere presentation
15 of the name of a social group can lead to the automatic activation of these associa-
16 tions. The use of stereotypes, which are well-learned sets of associations between
17 social category labels and attributes, has been likened to a habit (Devine, 1989). In
18 the presence of a stereotyped target, a habitualized response occurs: the automatic
19 activation of negative and potentially pernicious stereotypes. However, different
20 associations can be learned and become equally habitualized. For those commit-
21 ted to the goal of egalitarianism, not only is the African American stereotype not
22 activated in the presence of an African American (Moskowitz, Gollwitzer, Wasel
23 & Schaal, 1999), but also the egalitarian goal *is* activated (Moskowitz, Salomon &
24 Taylor, 2000). Egalitarian goals, rather than stereotypes, become the habitualized
25 response that guides information processing. By changing the connotative mean-
26 ing of the group label, via reappropriation, it may be possible for the group to be
27 revalued as a whole.
28   Part of reappropriation involves the rejection of the other's demeaning view
29 as both illegitimate and, more importantly, irrelevant to the world. It rejects the
30 looking-glass self and reflected appraisal view of group and individual self-esteem.
31 Reappropriation and self-labeling reject the other's appraisal as the foundational
32 component of the evaluated self. Nonetheless, there are a number of processes
33 that may contribute to acceptance of the revaluing by non-stigmatized groups.
34 Reappropriation may work because attitudes and evaluations toward the stigma-
35 tized are often ambivalent rather than uniformly negative. In the United States,
36 for example, this ambivalence is partly produced through two beliefs firmly and
37 simultaneously held by American: egalitarianism and individualism (Katz, 1981).
38 Belief in individualism, stemming from the Protestant work ethic, leads individ-
39 uals to assume that a meritocracy exists and the outcomes are produced through
40 individual effort. Egalitarianism suggests that each individual possesses his or her

own merit, that equality of opportunity is sacrosanct, and that meritocracy is just a fiction without it. In fact, prejudice towards the overweight is contingent upon the belief that weight is controllable (Crandall, 1994). The deep-seated attitudes of egalitarianism may allow the non-stigmatized to respond favorably to attempts to reappropriate stigmatizing labels.

In the end, widespread reevaluation may only occur when the group has already achieved sufficient status. In line with the positive feedback loop in which reappropriation is enmeshed, reappropriation may require rather than cause social reevaluation of the group. As mentioned above with both individual self-esteem and group cohesion, reappropriation may be simultaneously a cause and a consequence of increased social status. The quote that opened the chapter that concerned self-labeling as a "geek" is one example of how reappropriation may be a marker rather than a cause of increases in social standing. The ability to self-label using the formerly derogatory word "geek" may be the result of the "dot-com revolution" in which the link between computer aptitude and economic success became manifest. Those technical skills that used to imply lack of social grace now imply access to wealth. Changes in economic outcomes produced changes in the evaluative connotation of the word "geek."

Reappropriation that ultimately results in a cultural re-evaluation of the group has a number of consequences. Not only does the group label come to possess positive connotations, but the group and its members also have the potential for significant increments in self-esteem. Because self-esteem is often a marker of current social standing, the positive connotations associated with successful reappropriation may imply increased social status and result in even higher self-esteem. In addition, reappropriation may lead out-groups to acknowledge discrimination against the stigmatized group because discrimination is more likely to be recognized when perceivers feel positively towards the discriminated group (Bodenhausen, Schwarz, Bless & Waenke, 1995). By increasing the acknowledgment that discrimination exists, reappropriation may lead to the removal of barriers and obstacles that prevent equality of opportunity for the stigmatized.

Achievement of the third level of our model, a cultural re-evaluation of the stigmatized group, is not necessarily an either/or phenomenon; it is not the case that groups are stigmatized by all members of society, nor are they valued by all members of society. Revaluation occurs along a continuum. This is particularly true in pluralistic societies; some segments of society accept the reappropriation through self-labeling and raise the status of the stigmatized group, while others do not. Although we have presented the label "queer" as having more closely approximated the third level of our model compared to the label "nigger," many Americans still do not accept homosexuality. The gay community has been revalued by some groups in society (e.g. liberals), but not others (e.g. the religious

right). Thus, even the reappropriation of the label "queer" has been only partially successful. Complete and unqualified cultural acceptance of a stigmatized group is most certainly very rare indeed. Given that achievements at the third level of our model are never absolute and must be considered to exist along a continuum, it makes sense to consider the reappropriation of stigmatized labels as more or less successful at cultural reevaluation.

SOME PRELIMINARY EXPLORATIONS INTO THE EFFECTS OF REAPPROPRIATION

In this chapter we have presented a model of reappropriation, detailing both its causes and consequences. In this section, we provide some preliminary evidence in favor of a few of the aspects of the model: that self-labeling can increase evaluations of an individual (the first level of our model), it can change the connotative meaning of the label, revaluing it positively (the second level of our model), and it can increase acknowledgment of discrimination against the self-labeling group (the third level of our model). One of the major themes of reappropriation is the idea that the denotative meaning underlying a concept or label is not always disputed but instead, it is the interpretive category, or connotative evaluative meaning, that is transformed. Traits often take on different connotative meanings when placed in the context of the in-group versus the out-group. For example, intelligence when describing Jews (when they are an out-group) may be interpreted negatively as conniving. With regard to group-based evaluations (Brewer, 1979), loyal may be considered positively when describing the in-group, but take on negative connotations, such as clannish or exclusionary, when describing the out-group. Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) presented traits in the context of the in-group and the out-group and asked participants to rate the favorability of each trait (cf. Esses & Zanna, 1995). Traits were rated less favorably in the context of the out-group, even when the assignment of traits did not differ. Given that stigma is conceived here as a situational threat, the categories used to interpret stigmatizing labels should be context sensitive and thus open for valenced shifts in the context of reappropriation.

In order to investigate the effect that self-labeling would have on impressions, we (Galinsky, Hugenberg, Groom & Bodenhausen, 2002) exposed participants to a scenario in which two individuals in a high school came across each other in the hallway. The scenario suggested that new information had recently been discovered about some students. In one of the scenarios, a student, Bill, labels himself to another student, Tom, by stating, "I'm queer." In the other scenario, Tom labels Bill by stating, "You're queer." Afterwards, participants were asked to rate both individuals in the scenario along a number of different semantic differentials (e.g.

1 stupid-intelligent, weak-strong, etc.). This measure represents one of the conse-
2 quences from the first level of the model: that an individual who self-labels will
3 receive more positive personal evaluations. After a filler task, they were then asked
4 to do an unrelated task that was concerned with generating semantic words for a
5 future study. Participants were instructed, "generate as many 'semantic associates'
6 to the word as you can. A 'semantic associate' is a word or phrase that is generally
7 associated with the target word." The target word they were given was "queer." Af-
8 ter they finished generating their semantic associates, participants were instructed,
9 "Please return to the words you listed on the previous page and, next to each word
10 or phrase that you wrote down, assign a valence (favorability) rating for each of the
11 words using the following scale: —, –, 0, +, ++." The favorability rating represents
12 a consequence in the second level of our model: that reappropriation through self-
13 labeling will lead to an increase in the positive connotations associated with the
14 label. Finally participants were given an attitudes questionnaire. They were asked
15 to rate their agreement with a number of social and political questions including
16 the question, "Discrimination against gays is no longer a significant problem."
17 The discrimination question represents a consequence from the third level of our
18 model: that reappropriation will affect the recognition of discrimination against
19 stigmatized groups.
20   The manipulation of self-labeling versus being labeled had discernable effects
21 across all three measures and thus all three levels of our model. Evaluations of the
22 student were significantly more positive when he self-labeled, self-consciously re-
23 ferring to himself as queer, compared to when he was so labeled by another person.
24 Type of label also affected the interpretive meaning of the word "queer." Partici-
25 pants evaluated their own semantic associates to the word queer more positively
26 in the self-label condition. These results suggest that the meaning of the label was
27 transformed through self-labeling. For example the semantic associate "different,"
28 instead of meaning deviant, could mean unique or positively exceptional. Finally,
29 participants in the self-labeling condition rated discrimination against gays to be
30 more of a contemporary problem. This result is particularly counterintuitive. To
31 see an individual label someone with a potentially derogatory label would seem to
32 be a possible instance of discrimination. But Bodenhausen et al. (1995) found that
33 beliefs about contemporary discrimination are based on the contextualized evalu-
34 ation of that group. In their experiment, exposure to well-liked African Americans
35 such as Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey led to greater acknowledgement of dis-
36 crimination, despite the fact that Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey themselves
37 appear to be exempt from the constraints that discrimination imposes. In our ex-
38 periment, self-labeling led to more positive evaluations of the individual and of
39 the label, resulting in greater acknowledgement of discrimination despite the fact
40 that the other scenario seemed to contain more evidence of discrimination.

1   The study presented preliminary evidence in support of each level of our model.
2   The first level is concerned with the consequences for an individual who self-labels.
3   We demonstrated that self-labeling by an individual will lead to more positive
4   evaluations of that individual. At the second level, a collective decision to self-
5   label will ultimately lead to more positive connotations associated with the label,
6   which is what we found. The third level is concerned with the cultural reevaluation
7   of the group through reappropriation and a transformation of social relations.
8   Acknowledgment that a stigmatized group experiences discrimination is consistent
9   with that level of our model.
10   The data from the semantic associates measure suggest that the links from a
11 label to attributes can vary by the situation. The associative links between a cate-
12 gory label and the discrete elements of the category are often not equally strong
13 for all elements (Lepore & Brown, 1997; Wittenbrink et al., 2001). Lepore and
14 Brown note that ambiguous situations may have two different interpretations with
15 each interpretation differentially valenced. They cite the example of an Italian
16 man passing an envelope to an Italian woman during what appears to be a confi-
17 dential discussion. A positive (stereotypical) interpretation is that it is a romantic
18 exchange; a negative (stereotypical) interpretation is that it is mafia related. Both
19 interpretations are stereotypical but differ in the valence of the interpretation. Lep-
20 ore and Brown found that activating the category label for a stigmatized group had
21 a differential effect on high and low prejudiced individuals. High-prejudiced in-
22 dividuals interpreted later behavior according to the negatively valenced elements
23 of the stereotype, whereas low-prejudiced individuals rated that behavior relying
24 on the positively valenced elements of the stereotype.
25   The links between a category label and its discrete attributes can thus change
26 depending on the person (e.g. prejudice level) or based on the situation (e.g. self-
27 labeling). In addition the consequences of these links can have profound con-
28 sequences. Kray and colleagues (Kray, Galinsky & Thompson, in press; Kray,
29 Thompson & Galinsky, 2001) recently demonstrated how performance can be af-
30 fected by the links between a category and the attributes connected to that category
31 in a negotiation between a male and a female. They exposed negotiators to a cat-
32 egory label, effective negotiator, and connected that label to one of two kinds of
33 traits. In one case, the label "effective negotiator" was connected to stereotypically
34 male traits (e.g. assertive, rational). In another condition, the label was connected
35 to stereotypically female traits (e.g. verbally expressive, intuitive, understanding of
36 emotions). When the category of effective negotiator was connected to stereotyp-
37 ically male traits, men outperformed women at the bargaining table. The reverse
38 pattern occurred, women outperforming men, when stereotypically female traits
39 were linked to the category of effective negotiator. When stereotypically female
40 traits were activated, women felt empowered and men felt stereotype threat at the

1 bargaining table. This pattern reversed when stereotypically female and male traits
2 were linked to the category of ineffective negotiator. The traits remained the same,
3 but the valence of the label was altered. These results further support the notion that
4 stereotype threat and stigmatization are inherently malleable, in essence situational
5 phenomena.

IMPLICATIONS OF REAPPROPRIATION FOR TEAMS AND GROUPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

11 Although we have mainly discussed reappropriation in terms of large-scale so-
12 cial groups, the implications of our model extend to more narrowly defined work
13 groups and organizational teams. In considering how labels and their meanings
14 may play a role in the group processes of task-oriented teams, the complexity and
15 range of the possible effects immediately becomes apparent. The potentially stig-
16 matizing labels may be exogenous to an organization, as with labels connected to
17 larger social categories (e.g. ethnicity), or may be endogenous and specific to an
18 organization, referring to groups with specialized (and under-appreciated) skills
19 and task assignments. In addition, the use of labels, alternatively as a device of
20 derogation or as an instrument of reappropriation, may depend on the composition
21 of the group. Individuals connected to a potentially stigmatizing label may make
22 up a small minority of a team or they may make up the whole of the team (group
23 processes in general are affected by the heterogeneity of a team's composition (see
24 Wageman, 1999, for a review)).

25 Situations in which only a single member of a team is faced with a stigmatizing
26 label can be seen as representative of the first level of our model in which a solitary
27 individual attempts to reappropriate and revalue a label through self-labeling. Of
28 course, the individual, although solitary in the context of the team, may be acting
29 as a part of a concerted effort by the larger collective that is connected to the label.
30 Situations in which the whole team, presumably a homogenous one, reappropriates
31 a stigmatizing label can be seen as representative of the second level of our model.
32 Just as the first and second levels of our model have different causes and effects,
33 so too should reappropriation in these two different situations have differential
34 antecedents and consequences.

35 Reappropriation through self-labeling may allow for more effective participa-
36 tion by the individual burdened with the stigmatizing label and ultimately improve
37 team performance. According to our model, an individual within a team who at-
38 tempts to reappropriate a stigmatizing label may procure more positive evaluations
39 from other team members, feel more self-efficacious, and be able to suspend the
40 disabling effects on performance of stereotype threat. The feelings of self-efficacy

may allow the individual to become a full participating, rather than a marginalized and peripheral, member of a team. The stigmatized individual may be freed from the cognitive burdens of stigma (Lord & Saenz, 1985) or from the strong pull of stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) and show increased commitment to the task at hand. The stigmatized individual may also feel freer to express his/her perspective and to share unique and disconfirming information. This may be particularly useful because group decision making is often hampered by the ability of groups to utilize and pool all the available information that group members posses (Larson, Foster-Fishman & Keys, 1994; Stasser & Titus, 1985) and by the tendency to focus on information that confirms and supports initial predilections (Schulz-Hardt, Frey, Luthgens & Moscovici, 2000). When the individual from a stigmatizing group possesses unique or disconfirming information that is critical for decision accuracy, reappropriation may allow that individual to feel confident in sharing such information. The sharing of information may be particularly pronounced when that information is relevant to the stigmatizing label itself; for example, when a member of a marketing team is a member of a stigmatized group (and market segment) that the team is looking to target for a new product.

There may be different effects of reappropriation through self-labeling when the stigmatizing label is connected to groups (and their concomitant identities) that are exogenous versus endogenous to the organization. When the label is both exogenous to the organization (i.e. ethnicity) and unrelated to the group task, the effects of self-labeling on performance may be muted. However, when the label is endogenous to the organization and task relevant, then the effects may be more pronounced. Individuals from stigmatized areas of an organization that participate in a cross-functional team with non-stigmatized members, may feel emboldened through reappropriation and exert agency on behalf of the stigmatized unit within the cross-functional team. Not only might impressions of the self-labeled individual improve, but it might also carry over to evaluations of the unit itself.

A whole team or division within an organization may also attempt to reappropriate a stigmatizing label, especially when the label is endogenous to the organization. For example, technical units are often burdened by stigmatizing labels that suggest that the individuals posses only narrow levels of expertise and lack social skills (not unlike the quote about the label "geek" with which we opened the chapter). Lehman Brothers eventually fell victim to a takeover when a war over control of the organization broke out between the bankers and the traders (Auletta, 1985a, 1985b). The traders, despite generating a majority of the profits, were burdened by their label of "trader," which came to refer to "poorly educated drones with digital minds." Like "brown eyes," a merely descriptive label can come to take on more insidious undercurrents and eventually become stigmatizing in and of itself.

When an entire team reappropriates stigma through self-labeling, they may come to feel more cohesive, efficacious, and motivated. Cohesion often improves task performance, particularly when the team members are interdependent, the task is routine and a high level of coordination is required (Gully, Devine & Whitney, 1995; Mullen & Cooper, 1994). The increased coordination that co-hesion allows may also facilitate the production of a transactive memory system, which is a group-level shared information processing system (Wegner, 1986) that allows group members to realize who knows what and to recruit the necessary information or skills to perform the task at hand. Transactive memory systems allow individuals to overcome coordination loss that impairs team effectiveness (Moreland, Argote & Krishnan, 1996).

Reappropriation may draw attention to subtle forms of discrimination that the stigmatized team within the organization faces. Thus, reappropriation may make implicit forms of bias explicit and therefore addressable. Having increased aware-ness of inequities and systematic forms of discrimination, reappropriation may eventually lead to more equitable distribution (and redistribution) of valued orga-nizational resources. The accruing of resources may further lead to a revaluing of the group.

As discussed throughout this chapter, reappropriation through self-labeling may be as much a marker of increased status as a cause of it. This idea should hold as true for teams within organizations as it does for broader social categories. In investment banking firms, the connotative associations connected to the label trader may depend on the current level of profitability of this group or the percentage of its members that currently sit on the board or are partners. In other organizations, revalued labels may depend on the percentage of the budget that the unit is able to procure. Using the label as a badge of honor may depend on the construction of pride-inducing products by one's group.

We are not suggesting that self-labeling using a stigmatizing label is always a panacea. There are a number of potential deleterious effects that could accrue for the individual or the group. Self-labeling could have interpersonal costs. The derogatory components, rather than the alternative (positive) attributes, could be reinforced and applied to the individual. Other team members could feel uncom-fortable and uneasy, leading to subtle forms of exclusion or leading other team members to become cautious in their own expressions (e.g. for fear of being labeled as prejudiced) and to seek to avoid conflict. Thus, although reappropria-tion may allow the self-labeler to take a more active role in a team, it may lead the other members to recede into passivity. The avoidance of conflict could prevent teams from capitalizing on the benefits of diversity and conflict on group perfor-mance (Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999), and self-labeling may lead conflict to be construed destructively at the relationship level, rather than

1   constructively at the task level. In addition, when a whole team reappropriates a
2   label, the negative effects of group cohesion may emerge (e.g. group polarization,
3   Hogg, Turner & Davidsion, 1990; and groupthink, Janis, 1982). Thus, although
4   a self-labeling individual may be more likely to share unique and divergent in-
5   formation in a heterogeneous group, when all the group members share the label,
6   there may be strict pressures towards uniformity and hostility to discrepant views.
7   Finally, as group members rally around the reappropriated label, the seeds of in-
8   tergroup conflict may be sewn. Group formation and cohesion typically precedes
9   intergroup conflict and using a reappropriated label as a rallying cry could be
10   one sufficient mechanism to promote the necessary group identity to engage in
11   intergroup rivalry (Sherif, 1966; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood & Sherif, 1961).
12   Although we have presented some preliminary evidence in support of our model,
13   future research should test the elements of model more directly, both with larger
14   social groups as well as teams within organizations. There are two different ap-
15   proaches one could take in testing the model presented here. One approach would
16   be to manipulate or measure the antecedent variables and to see if they are as-
17   sociated with a willingness to self-label. Manipulating or measuring self-esteem,
18   group cohesion, recognition of injustice, and system justification beliefs may shed
19   light on whether these variables are critical in leading individuals to reappropriate
20   through self-labeling. An alternative approach is to manipulate whether individuals
21   self-label and then look at the subsequent judgmental and behavioral consequences.
22   The most exhaustive approach would be to manipulate the antecedents and not only
23   measure self-labeling but also the subsequent effects of judgments and behavior.
24   This approach would allow one to test whether self-labeling mediates the effects
25   of the antecedent causes on the final outcome measures. In addition, the presuppo-
26   sition that stigma and labeling are inherently malleable could be tested by having
27   individuals reappropriate some stigmatizing labels but not others, especially for
28   those individuals burdened with multiple stigmatizing labels. Archival data may
29   also allow for an investigation of whether reappropriation of labels causes eleva-
30   tions in social standing or is simply a marker of increased status. The distinction
31   between labels that are endogenous versus exogenous to an organization, and the
32   differences between situations in which a stigmatizing label applies to a whole
33   team versus a solitary individual within a team, appear to be particularly fruitful
34   avenues for research.

CONCLUSION

39   There is pain in being a geek. Indeed, there is pain in being a member of any stig-
40   matized group. We propose that this pain, in the form of threatened self-esteem,

poorer work outcomes, and generally fewer chances to achieve desired life out-comes, is both elicited by and reinforced by the negatively valenced labels that are used to refer to these stigmatized groups. Indeed, a negative label can immediately call to mind its negative connotative meanings (Greenwald et al., 1998). Further, by internalizing these negative connotative meanings, the very system that forced a group into a stigmatized role is reified (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Some individuals and indeed, some groups have recognized, however, that the connotative evaluative meanings of words and labels are labile and open to nego-tiation and further that this renegotiation is a means of improving group status. By taking a formerly negative group label, a label used by advantaged out-groups to demean and derogate the stigmatized in-group, and by using it to refer positively to one's self and one's group, the connotative meaning of the label is challenged. It is this challenge to the status quo, the renegotiation of meaning, that is at the heart of social creativity and reappropriation. While this challenge may deflect the sting of the label on an individual basis, the true power of reappropriation can be shown when the group at large reappropriates a label, potentially forcing a larger cultural shift in the meaning of the label, and potentially in the social standing of the group. Reappropriation may not only allow groups to revalue stigmatizing labels and ultimately their social identities, but also to retain one of the benefits of stigma, namely a sense of distinctiveness; thus, reappropriation can maximize both relative status and relative distinctiveness. As contemporary society moves toward multiculturalism, reappropriation could become a more common occurrence, with stigmatized groups coming to wear their labels as a badge of pride.

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