**Jim Sidanius**



Jim Sidanius, John Lindsley Professor of Psychology in memory of William James and of African and African American Studies in the Departments of Psychology and African and African American Studies at Harvard University, has passed away unexpectedly in his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at age 75. A giant among political psychologists, he was a key contributor not only to the field in general, but also to ISPP in particular—serving variously as a vice president of ISPP, a member of the ISPP Governing Council over multiple terms, and as an Editor of the journal *Political Psychology*.

It is difficult to overestimate the scope of Jim's contributions as a scholar. His work, as embodied in over 300 scientific papers and four major books, reshaped our understanding of intergroup relations and political attitudes and behavior in group-stratified societies. He earned his PhD in psychology from the Department of Psychology at the University of Stockholm in 1977 guided by Bo Ekehammar. Jim then held appointments at a number of prestigious institutions, including Carnegie-Mellon University, the University of Texas at Austin, New York University, Princeton University, the University of California, Los Angeles, and finally Harvard University. During his lifetime, he received numerous awards and honors that attest to his stature in the field, including the Society for Personality and Social Psychology's 2013 Career Contribution Award and 2021 APA Distinguished Scientific Contributions Award for the Applications of Psychology. He was also inducted as a Fellow to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2007, and he was a Fellow in both the Association for Psychological Science and the Society for Experimental Social Psychology. Some of his papers won the Gordon Allport Intergroup Relations Prize and the Society for Experimental Social Psychology 2020 Distinguished Scientific Paper Award.

His accomplishments received particular notice in the International Society for Political Psychology (ISPP), which was always his first and foremost home within social science. Most notably, he received ISPP's Harold Lasswell Award for distinguished contribution in the field of political psychology in 2006. In further recognition of his accomplishments as a scholar and a mentor to countless students who have gone on to distinguished careers of their own, ISPP recently renamed its Early Career Achievement Award after him.

Jim contributed to a number of important literatures in social and political psychology over his lifetime, beginning with his work on the nature of political extremism in the 1970s and 1980s. Here, his original *context theory* offered an innovative argument: that political extremists actually showed greater cognitive sophistication than centrists on a number of dimensions, since deviating from "safe" moderate positions requires a greater level of skill in defending one's positions. However, Jim's most important intellectual contribution was *social dominance theory* (SDT). Developed in collaboration with Professor Felicia Pratto of the University of Connecticut, SDT is a general model of how group-based hierarchies are developed, maintained, and reproduced. SDT explicates the personality, ideological, and even biological mechanisms

underlying individual discrimination, institutional discrimination, and argues that power-based asymmetries in group-serving behavior reinforce inequality between groups. Importantly, SDT centers a facet of social life that is more marginal (though not absent) in many other social-psychological perspectives on intergroup relations: group-based power differences. As Jim and his colleagues argued, intergroup conflict is not merely about seeking a positive image for the ingroup or seeking group material interests, as important as these things are; rather, it is in large part about competition for group-based dominance, and the tension between hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating (egalitarian) forces, all of which have deep evolutionary roots.

Among theories of intergroup relations, SDT stands out for the scope of its contribution. It is a truly integrative theory, bringing together multiple levels of analysis and perspectives from a wide variety of disciplines—the psychology of individual differences, communication sciences, organizational behavior, anthropology, political theory, sociology, and evolutionary biology. Moreover, rather than dismissing the insights of other perspectives, it weaves them into a broader multilevel model of intergroup organization, attitudes, and behavior. In this respect, Jim's most important theoretical contribution helped bring social psychology back to the classical, "big-picture" roots of its founders, and it also helped popularize interest in the evolutionary roots of social behavior among social and political psychologists. SDT is now part of the core "canon" of major theories in the psychological study of intergroup relations, placing it in the same realm as social identity theory and contact theory. In short, Jim's work is a model of intellectual breadth, courage and integrative imagination that has few peers. It changed the fields of social and political psychology.

Despite his vast record of accomplishment, Jim was always humble and generous with students and colleagues alike. Beloved by his students and postdocs, he was delighted whenever his mentees were able to bring solid empirical evidence on key questions--also, and perhaps especially, when it contradicted his own previous theoretical intuitions (which was not often). Though he expected much of his students, he always did so with deep respect and with complete confidence in their ability to deliver—and he was always ready to provide whatever support his students required along the way. His door was always open, both literally and figuratively. He was one of life's greats, and endlessly kind.

Jim was beloved by his wife Miriam, his son Che and daughter-in-law Kate, and toddler-aged grandchild. His enormous presence will be missed always, but his influence will live on.

Memorial contributions may be made to ISPP, P.O. Box 1213, Columbus, NC 28722, USA or https://ispp.org/donate/ or to Doctors without Borders.

If you would like to join a virtual memorial taking place on Saturday 17th July to mark Jim's passing and celebrate his life and impact, please click here to register your interest. (Even if you can't make it to the event, you can use this link to share memories or reflections that we will compile and circulate to those interested, including Jim's family and colleagues).

Additional remembrances of Jim by his ISPP friends follow.

*By Christopher Federico*
*https://ispp.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Jim-Sidanius-Obituary-V2.pdf*