

PSYCHOLOGY OF PREJUDICE: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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CONTENTS

	Page number
INTRODUCTION	3
FORMATION OF PREJUDICED ATTITUDES	5
STEREOTYPING	7
RACIAL/ETHNIC STEREOTYPING	8
GROUP DIFFERENCES AND PREJUDICE	9
Realistic Group Conflict Theory	9
Social Identity Theory	10
PREJUDICE AT SOCIETAL LEVEL	13
ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE PREJUDICE	16
Individual level	16
Group level	16
Social level	17
REFERENCES	19

INTRODUCTION

Prejudice can be seen as a particular example of an attitude. A traditional definition by Secord and Backman (1964) is "an attitude that predisposes a person to think, feel, perceive and act in favourable and unfavourable ways towards a group and its members".

Thus prejudice can be both positive and negative for them, though usually it is seen as negative, and most research has concentrated on racial prejudice. Coon (1983) is more specific; prejudice is a "negative attitude or prejudgment tinged with unreasonable suspicion, fear or hatred".

According to Secord and Backman (1964), any attitude has three components:

- i) cognitive component - stereotypes of the prejudiced group;
- ii) affective component - strong feeling of hostility;
- iii) behavioural component - how the individual responds to their attitudes, and this is often called "discrimination".

For Allport (1954), there are five levels of prejudiced behaviour:

1. anti-locution: hostile talk about/towards the prejudiced group;
2. avoidance: keeping a distance and not mixing with the prejudiced group;
3. discrimination: unfair treatment of group members;
4. physical attack: figures suggest that "racial attacks" still continue in the UK to be a problem; one "racist attack" every 28 minutes in 1994 (quoted in Wetherell 1996);
5. extermination: the ultimate level of prejudice is to want to remove the prejudiced group from existence. This has sometimes been called "ethnic cleansing" in recent years.

At the extreme levels of prejudiced behaviour, the key is that the prejudiced group is dehumanised. The psychological erasure of human qualities in others; thus misperceiving them as "sub-human" or "non-human".

Increased aggression against dehumanised groups has been shown in a lab experiment (Bandura 1986).

Participants had the opportunity to give electric shocks to male students during a decision-making task. Beforehand, the participants overheard the experimenter talk about the students as intelligent ("the humanising condition"), or as rotten ("the dehumanising condition"). The average number of electric shocks given in the "humanising condition" were 2.5 compared to 6.0 in the "dehumanising condition".

Prejudice can both overt and covert, direct and indirect. Cochrane (1992) mentions "disguised discrimination" where the criteria by which decisions are made appear objective but are discriminatory; eg: housing available to families with one child discriminates against groups with larger families.

There is also "adjectival racism", according to Cochrane, where certain terms are used to support the stereotypes; eg: "black muggers": ethnic identity mentioned when mugger is black, but not when white.

Prejudice is not just about holding particular attitudes which lead to certain behaviours. Prejudice actually influences an individual's perception of the world. In a classic experiment, Hastorf and Cantril (1954) showed that watching the same American Football match, supporters of each team will attribute less fouls to their team, and more to the opponents (even though both teams committed the same number).

Similarly, researchers have shown the same news programme about Middle East issues to pro-Israel and pro-Arab students. Both groups saw the programme as bias against them. So we are talking about a distortion in perception that needs to be addressed while attempting to reduce prejudice.

FORMATION OF PREJUDICED ATTITUDES

Where prejudice comes from is an important question. There are a number of possibilities:

1. Learnt

The basic principles of learning suggest that children observe others expressing prejudiced attitudes or doing prejudiced behaviour, and then copy it (social learning theory). This may explain how specific attitudes or actions are transferred within families, but not more general attitudes or behaviour.

However, other factors are also involved, like the media. Pratkanis and Aronson (1991) report how at the start of the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein was unknown to most Americans, and through classical conditioning (associating) his picture with that of Hitler, negative attitudes were formed.

2. Personality type

Adorno et al (1950), while testing the personality of a large number of people in California, who were white, non-Jewish, native-born, middle-class Americans (ie: WASP - white Anglo-Saxon Protestant), found them to be "anti-everything-except other WASPs".

The key characteristics were anti-semitism, ethnocentrism (ie: focused on own ethnic group), politically conservative, and authoritarian (eg: belief in absolute submission to authority). These characteristics together became known as the "authoritarian personality".

Such individuals had experienced rigid and harsh childhood punishment, which made them intolerant of anything that was different. The "California F Scale" was designed to identify the characteristics of the "authoritarian personality".

3. Cognitive Developmental Theory

This theory argues that intergroup discrimination and stereotypes are the product of information-processing biases in young children, and are linked to egocentrism in Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Aboud 1988).

The child passes through three stages of development of racial attitudes:

- i) racial awareness - the growing awareness of

differences between individuals based on racial or ethnic groups;

ii) racial orientation - the child focuses on the differences between the racial and ethnic groups. But it is important that the child is hearing racial-based comments during this stage;

iii) true attitudes - if the child has heard negative racial-based comments, then they will form prejudiced attitudes. Today overt racism is not as common as the past, but the child can identify with the dominant ethos (which may include subtle prejudice).

Some writers have argued that this theory suggests that there is stage of development of natural prejudice that the child passes through usually.

STEREOTYPING

A key part of the prejudice attitude is the stereotypes held about the prejudiced group. Stereotyping is based upon quickly identifiable characteristics, and the assumptions that all members of that group are the same. Though there may be a "grain of truth" behind stereotypes, they are exaggerations and simplifications of the group's behaviour and characteristics (Allport 1954).

Thus we perceive the world as fitting into our stereotypes - ie: noticing the behaviour that confirms the stereotype and missing the contradictory information.

This leads to the overestimation of differences between "us" and "them", and an overestimation of the similarities between the members of the "them" group.

Some researchers have argued that stereotypes are beneficial as a means to process large amounts of information about the social world. This is sometimes known as the "cognitive miser model" (Taylor 1981).

However, this suggests that stereotypes are inevitable. Wetherell (1996) points out that stereotypes are not universal, as you would expect with the "cognitive miser model", but culture specific. This suggests a social construction of particular stereotypes - ie: stereotypical images of other groups serve a function to the groups concerned; eg: to make those with the negative stereotype feel better because they are not like "them".

Stereotyping influences behaviour in a number of ways:

- i) recall information better that fits the stereotype;
- ii) influences how we behave towards others;
- iii) affect the perception of our own group.

RACIAL/ETHNIC STEREOTYPING

This is the idea that certain characteristics are common to all people of a particular racial/ethnic group.

Katz and Braly (1933) were the first to show the existence of such stereotypes. One hundred Princeton University students in the USA were asked to choose five adjectives to describe different ethnic groups from a list of 84 adjectives. A clear consensus of adjectives chosen appeared (table 1).

Replications at the same university in the 1950s and 1960s failed to find such strong (usually negative) stereotypes. However, the latter research does show the existence of racial/ethnic stereotypes, and it may be that participants are less open about crude generalisations, not that they don't hold them anymore.

GERMANS		JEWS		AMERICANS	
scientific		shrewd	79	industrious	48
-minded	78	mercenary	49	intelligent	47
industrious	65	industrious	48	materialistic	33
stolid	44	grasping	34	ambitious	33
intelligent	32	intelligent	29	progressive	27
methodical	31				
CHINESE		ITALIANS			
superstitious	34	artistic	53		
sly	29	impulsive	44		
conservative	29	passionate	37		
tradition-		quick-tempered	35		
loving	26	musical	32		
loyal to family	22				

(After Katz and Braly 1933)

Table 1 - Examples of top five adjectives chosen for different ethnic groups and percentage ticking the adjectives.

GROUP DIFFERENCES AND PREJUDICE

Prejudice between individuals may be a product of group differences - either the groups are in competition (realistic group conflict theory) or the group identity is part of social identity (social identity theory).

REALISTIC GROUP CONFLICT THEORY

This theory by Sherif and Sherif (1969) is based on their work with ingroups and outgroups in three projects in the 1940s and 1950s in the USA. They argue that prejudice arises as a result of the conflict of interests; ie: both groups want the same goal, but cannot have it. This leads to ingroup (own group - "us") favouritism and outgroup discrimination ("them"). For Sherif and Sherif, it is the immediate social situation that produces prejudice.

The Sherifs' research is sometimes known as the "Robber's Cave Experiment" and used 11-12 year-old boys at an isolated summer camp. The boys were from similar social backgrounds. This type of research is a field experiment. On arrival at the camp, the boys were allowed to make friends, then they were divided into two groups (eg: "Red Devils" or "Bulldogs"). The researchers made sure that best friends were separated.

The research manipulated two key variables of group conflict:

- i) Strong group identity through group name and flag;
- ii) direct competition for scarce resources between the two groups.

Very clear prejudice and hostility developed between the two groups (eg: stealing and burning the flag of the other group). Later in the projects, the researchers worked to reduce the prejudice.

Evaluation of Sherif and Sherif (1969)

1. Boys only used in research.
2. USA study in 1940s/50s.

A replication in the UK by Tyerman and Spencer (1983) with scout patrols did not automatically produce

conflict and hostility. However, in this study, all the participants were from the same scout unit.

3. Ethics of research.

It is not clear if the boys' parents knew of the research (and gave their informed consent). The boys could not withdraw because the camp was isolated. There were risks both physical and psychological to manipulating the group behaviour. For example, the groups started fighting in one of the experiments. Also breaking up the friendships at the beginning of the projects could be seen as unethical.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Tajfel and Turner (1979) link group conflict to an individual's self identity. The self concept includes identification with our social groups and comparison with other such groups. The social group may be transitory (eg: group standing at bus stop) or more permanent social distinctions (eg: gender).

The basis of the social identity theory is the tendency to classify people and things into categories, which leads to an exaggeration of the differences. Tajfel and Wilkes (1963) asked participants to judge the length of groups of lines either labelled (eg: A or B) or unlabelled.

There was a tendency to judge the labelled lines as similar (eg: lines within group A) and exaggerate the differences to other groups, even though this was inaccurate. Stereotypes can also be involved in this process.

At the same time as categorising behaviour, individuals search for positive self-esteem by assessing their social groups as "better" than others. It feels good to belong to the best group, whatever that group may be. What this means is that ingroup bias can occur without a strong group identity and direct competition as Sherif and Sherif believed there needed to be. It is the mere perception of the existence of another group that matters. This is known as the minimal group effect.

The original and main study is Tajfel (1970). Using 64 14-15 year-old Bristol schoolboys, they were randomly allocated to one of two groups (for example, by preference for abstract paintings by Klee or Kandinsky; or tossing a coin). There was no reference to group identity: the individuals were anonymous, and doing the

experiment in individual cubicles. There was no obvious self-interest involved.

The boys were then asked to allocate points as rewards to different individuals for no particular reason, using different matrices of points. The allocation process could be done in four ways (figure 1):

- i) fairness - equal points for both groups;
- ii) maximum joint profit - greatest points in total but no control over which group got what;
- iii) maximum ingroup profit - greatest points to own group, irrelevant of other group;
- iv) maximum difference - greatest reward for own group and least for outgroup.

EXAMPLE OF MATRIX FOR ALLOCATING POINT REWARDS

Klee group	11	12	23	13	25	19	11	12
Kandinsky group	5	7	29	13	17	1	29	27
STRATEGY	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h

EXAMPLES OF STRATEGIES

	KLEE GROUP	KANDINSKY GROUP
FAIRNESS	d	d
MAXIMUM JOINT PROFIT	c	c
MAXIMUM INGROUP PROFIT	e	g
MAXIMUM DIFFERENCE	f	h

Figure 1 - Examples of strategies for allocating rewards available in Tajfel (1970).

It was found that the majority of boys gave greater rewards to individuals in their own groups; ie: they used "maximum ingroup profit" and "maximum difference" strategies. Though this study is an artificial experiment, Reicher (1984) found that social identity was important in explaining behaviour in the rioting in the St.Paul's area of Bristol in 1980.

This approach tends to see prejudice as an inevitable part of social life. Individuals will form social identities, and thus be prejudiced against the

outgroup to increase their own self-esteem.

However, Wetherell (1982) has found that cultural norms are an important variable. She produced a replication of Tajfel (1970) in New Zealand with white and Polynesian children. The latter children were more generous with their rewards to the outgroup (ie: "maximum joint profit" strategy). This is because generosity to others is a strong Polynesian cultural norm.

PREJUDICE AT SOCIETAL LEVEL

Explanations for prejudice can concentrate on the individual (eg: authoritarian personality) or group behaviour, but there is also the attitudes in society generally.

Skellington (1995) has looked at the effects of racism in British society in three areas of social life:

i) Attitudes of white individuals - for example, in a 1993 survey, 25% of respondents said they would "object to living next door to non-white people".

ii) Economic inequalities - less men from ethnic minorities work in professional managerial positions (eg: 28% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi) compared to white men (36%).

Unemployment is also higher among ethnic minorities. These figures are examples of "institutional racism" because all individuals do not have equal opportunities to compete for jobs. But in our society, attributions tend to concentrate on the individual, and blame them for the failure to succeed.

It is easy to say that individuals do not succeed because of their lack of efforts and do succeed if they work hard, but this is a shared meaning or "discourse" which is inaccurate. It is beneficial to those at the top of society to justify such "discourses".

iii) Violent physical attacks - for example, eight people died as a consequence of "racial attacks" in 1992.

Prejudice can be influenced by the media, and the ideas put forward by politicians. For example, the 1987 Conservative Party Election Manifesto placed "race" in the "Freedom, Law and Responsibility" section, thereby linking it with the "fight against crime" (Condor 1988).

The attitudes in society towards certain ethnic minorities can be part of "racist discourses" (Wetherell 1996). "Discourses" are the shared and accepted ideas of the time which define reality. For example, politicians making anti-immigration speeches set the agenda that allows prejudice against such groups to be acceptable.

For example, Margaret Thatcher made the classic "swamped" speech during the 1979 General Election campaign: "The British character has done so much for democracy, for law, and done so much throughout the world, that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in" (quoted in Cochrane 1992). Though this speech is not overtly racist, it sets the agenda where racism and "racial attacks" can be justified as

defending "British culture".

Individuals justify their prejudiced behaviour by referring to the "discourses" in society for support. One of the most common is "national identity" or "nationalism".

Cashmore (1987) interviewed a number of individuals in the West Midlands, and showed how prejudiced attitudes are embedded within the logic of defending "English culture". Cashmore quotes the example of a white company director who justifies his anti-immigration views through such "discourses" and ideas. The individual's prejudiced comments are embedded in arguments that link to the shared meanings that are obvious to the listeners.

The director says, for example, "there's a lot who come in just to draw the dole". Here he has linked to a number of shared meanings:

- a) England cannot afford to pay everybody benefits;
- b) I work hard for my money and do not want to subsidise "lazy" people;
- c) "they" are trying to take advantage of our welfare system;
- d) "they" are trying to take what is mine;
- e) such behaviour is not right.

Thus his prejudiced attitudes appear entirely rational by this logic. He says in other words, I am just doing what everybody does and protecting myself, my family and my country.

This ignores the fact that the world is not a fair place and historically Britain has benefited (and still does) from the exploitation of Third World countries. But the director's views are part of a social context.

Stories of "black people as scroungers" are common in the British tabloids; eg: "Jobless Abdul.. on 470 a week" (Daily Mail 1984 quoted in Gordon and Rosenberg 1989).

The debate about being "British" or "English" is often linked to being "white", yet this is clearly a multi-racial society and has been for at least half the 20th century. Yet, for example, "The Sun" in 1990 praised a black Conservative Party parliamentary candidate for describing herself as English, not black (Gabriel 1994).

Wetherell and Potter (1992) showed how white politicians in New Zealand justify their refusal of Maori

land claims, not as prejudice, but as sensible behaviour. Phrases used include: "You cannot turn the clock backwards" or "Resources should be used productively and in a cost effective manner".

Much of everyday talk links into common underlying meanings that individuals within the same group or society will understand. These are linked also to stereotypes. Politicians exploit such fears to gain votes. Mundy (1995) notes the link between "racial attacks" and British National Party support in East London.

ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE PREJUDICE

As to the cause of prejudice, that will influence the technique used to reduce prejudice. It is best to use a combination of techniques working at the individual, group and social levels.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL - Contact between individuals

Meeting individuals from the outgroup who do not match the stereotype challenges that negative stereotype. Often prejudice is maintained because individuals never meet those from the outgroup.

Deutsch and Collins (1951) found less prejudice in racially-integrated housing projects in the USA compared to segregated projects. Individuals had to mix because they lived together.

But there are a number of important points about such contact:

- the interaction must be non-competitive;
- individuals must meet as equal status;
- there must be relatively close interaction;
- contact in non-work (eg: social) situations is better.

But the non-stereotypical outgroup members may be seen as the exception, and the general group stereotypes remain. So contact between the groups is not enough.

In fact, if it is forced contact, this can increase the prejudice. For example, after the racial desegregation of schools in the USA in the 1960s, some education authorities deliberately mixed the schools by bussing pupils across the city. This policy often led to greater negative attitudes and prejudice.

GROUP LEVEL - Pursuit of common goals

As well as contact between individuals, it is important to get the groups they are members of to work together on common goals. In the Sherif and Sherif studies mentioned earlier, after the prejudice between the two groups was created, the researchers set about trying to reduce it.

The Sherifs created a number of "mini-crises" at the summer camp, like a breakdown of the water supply, which could only be resolved by the two groups working together. In most cases, this reduced the prejudice between the groups, and friendship developed between them. In a sense, by working together, the two groups had

become one group and new psychological identities were formed. This one group may have been prejudiced against other summer camps - ie: the point of prejudice had changed. The social identity theory would argue this point. For example, during war-time differences within a country are subsumed within a prejudice against the war enemy.

London Weekend Television set up an "experiment" ("The Blame Game" 2002) to see how four Catholics and four Protestants from Northern Ireland would respond to spending five days and nights together at an isolated outdoor activities centre on the Isle of Man. The eight people had to live and work together. Activities included a map reading exercise and a gorge walk. Tasks that deliberately made the two groups depend on each other. By the end of five days, there were positive feelings between the two groups, and attempts at understanding the others. What was most striking was how the two groups had never met outgroup members outside of conflict situations.

This "experiment" is not the same as a psychology experiment, but it is an interesting case study.

Aronson et al (1978) have developed this idea of working together with the "jigsaw classroom technique". In racially desegregated schools in the USA prejudice was still high between pupils. The "jigsaw classroom technique" requires the children to work together in order to succeed in class. Each pupil is given a piece of information, and only by sharing will the whole picture be gained.

However, though this technique reduces prejudice in the particular classroom situation, it does not generalise to reducing prejudice overall. Other studies have found the same success in reducing prejudice in specific situations but not overall. The reason for this is because of social structures which perpetuate prejudice.

SOCIAL LEVEL

Cochrane (1992) argues that social changes need to be made to help in reducing prejudice. These change include:

- i) increasing the general level of education and specifically educating against negative stereotypes;
- ii) laws making discrimination illegal which are enforced;

iii) laws encouraging equality of opportunity;

iv) restrictions on the media and their portrayal of stereotypes;

v) reduce environmental frustrations that encourage prejudice, like unemployment and poverty;

vi) the rejection of prejudice by political leaders;
ie: not using people's fears in election campaigns;

vii) encourage assimilation and inter-marriage

Many of these changes are obvious, and if implemented, would make an ideal society.

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