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PREJUDICE

Prejudice is a negative attitude toward an entire category of people. The two important components in this definition are attitude and entire category. Prejudice involves attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs—not actions. This entry provides an overview of elements of prejudice, a consideration of how prejudice relates to discrimination, a summary of theories that have been

advanced to explain prejudice, and a description of the ways in which prejudice is measured.

Overview

A prejudiced belief leads to categorical rejection. Prejudice does not mean disliking a person one meets because one finds that person's behavior to be objectionable. It means disliking an entire racial/ethnic group even if one has had little or no contact with that group. A college student who requests a room change after three weeks of enduring his roommate's sleeping all day, playing loud music all night, and piling garbage on his desk is not prejudiced. However, he is displaying prejudice if he requests a change on arriving at school and learning that his new roommate is of a different nationality.

Prejudice often is expressed through the use of ethnophaulisms, or ethnic slurs, which include derisive nicknames such as "honky," "gook," and "wet-back." Ethnophaulisms also include speaking about or to members of a particular group in a condescending way (e.g., "José does well in school for a Mexican American") or referring to a middle-aged woman as "one of the girls."

Prejudice and Discrimination

Prejudice and discrimination are related concepts but are not the same. Prejudice is a belief or an attitude, whereas discrimination is action. Discrimination involves behavior that excludes all members of a group from certain rights, opportunities, or privileges. Like prejudice, it must be categorical. If an employer refuses to hire as a typist an Italian American who is illiterate, it is not discrimination. If she refuses to hire any Italian Americans because she thinks that they are incompetent and does not make the effort to see whether an Italian American applicant is qualified, it is discrimination.

In exploring the relationship between negative attitudes (prejudice) and negative behavior (discrimination), sociologist Robert Merton identified four major categories. The label added to each of Merton's categories may more readily identify the type of person being described:

1. The unprejudiced nondiscriminator: all-weather liberal
2. The unprejudiced discriminator: reluctant liberal

3. The prejudiced nondiscriminator: timid bigot
4. The prejudiced discriminator: all-weather bigot

As the term is used in types 1 and 2, liberals are committed to equality among people. The all-weather liberal believes in equality and practices it. Merton was quick to observe that all-weather liberals may be far removed from any real competition with subordinate groups such as African Americans and women. Furthermore, such people may be content with their own behavior and may do little to change themselves. The reluctant liberal is not so committed to equality between groups. Social pressure may cause such a person to discriminate. Fear of losing employees may lead a manager to avoid promoting women to supervisory capacities. Equal opportunity legislation may be the best way to influence the reluctant liberal.

Types 3 and 4 do not believe in equal treatment for racial/ethnic groups, but they vary in their willingness to act. The timid bigot will not discriminate if discrimination costs money or reduces profits or if he or she is pressured not to discriminate by peers or the government. The all-weather bigot acts without hesitation on the prejudiced beliefs that he or she holds.

Merton's typology points out that prejudicial attitudes should not be confused with discriminatory behavior. People do not always act as they believe. More than 70 years ago, Richard LaPiere exposed the relationship between racial attitudes and social conduct. From 1930 to 1932, LaPiere traveled throughout the United States with a Chinese couple. Despite an alleged climate of intolerance of Asians, LaPiere observed that the couple was treated courteously at hotels, motels, and restaurants. He was puzzled by the good reception they received given that all of the conventional attitude surveys showed extreme prejudice by Whites toward Chinese.

Was it possible that LaPiere had been fortunate during his travels and consistently stopped at places operated by the tolerant members of the dominant group? To test this possibility, he sent questionnaires asking the very establishments at which they had been served whether each owner would "accept members of the Chinese race as guests in your establishment." More than 90% responded "no" even though LaPiere's Chinese couple had been treated politely at all of the establishments. How can this inconsistency be explained? People who returned questionnaires reflecting prejudice were unwilling to act based on those asserted beliefs; they were timid bigots.

The LaPiere study is not without flaws. First, he had no way of knowing whether each respondent to the questionnaire was the same person who had served him and the Chinese couple. Second, he accompanied the Chinese couple, but the questionnaire suggested that the arrival would be unescorted (and, in the minds of some, uncontrolled) and perhaps would consist of many Chinese people. Third, personnel may have changed between the time of the visit and the mailing of the questionnaire.

The LaPiere technique has been replicated with similar results. This technique raises the question of whether attitudes are important if they are not completely reflected in behavior. But even if attitudes are not important in small matters, they are important in other ways: Lawmakers legislate and courts may reach decisions based on what the public thinks.

This is not just a hypothetical possibility. Legislators in the United States often are persuaded to vote in a certain way, for example, by what they perceive as changed attitudes toward immigration, affirmative action, and prayer in public schools. Sociologists have enumerated some of prejudice's functions. For the majority group, it serves to maintain privileged occupations and more power for its members.

Theories of Prejudice

Prejudice is learned. Friends, relatives, newspapers, books, movies, television, and the Internet all teach it. At an early age, people become aware that there are differences between people that society judges to be important. Several theories have been advanced to explain the rejection of certain groups in a society, and four of them are examined here. The first two, scapegoating and authoritarian personality, tend to be psychological, emphasizing why a particular person harbors ill feelings. The second two theories, exploitation and normative, are more sociological, viewing prejudice in the context of people's interaction in a larger society.

Scapegoating Theory

Scapegoating theory states that prejudiced people believe they are society's victims. The term *scapegoat* comes from a biblical injunction telling the Hebrews to send a goat into the wilderness to symbolically carry away the people's sins. Similarly, the theory of scapegoating suggests that, rather than accepting guilt

for some failure, a person transfers the responsibility for failure to some vulnerable group. In the major tragic 20th-century example, Adolf Hitler used the Jews as the scapegoat for all German social and economic ills during the 1930s. This premise led to the passage of laws restricting Jewish life in pre-World War II Germany and eventually escalated into the mass extermination of Europe's Jews.

Today in the United States, immigrants—whether legal or illegal—often are blamed by “real Americans” for their failure to get jobs or secure desirable housing. The immigrants become the scapegoat for people's own lack of skills, planning, and/or motivation. It is so much easier to blame someone else.

Like exploitation theory (discussed later), scapegoating theory enhances understanding of why prejudice exists but does not explain all of its facets. For example, scapegoating theory offers little explanation of why a specific group is selected or why frustration is not taken out on the real culprit whenever possible. Also, both the exploitation and scapegoating theories suggest that every person sharing the same general experiences in society would be equally prejudiced, but that is not the case. Prejudice varies between individuals who seem to benefit equally from the exploitation of a subordinate group or who have experienced equal frustration. In an effort to explain these personality differences, social scientists developed the concept of the authoritarian personality.

Authoritarian Personality Theory

A number of social scientists do not see prejudice as an isolated trait that anyone can have. Several efforts have been made to detail the prejudiced personality, but the most comprehensive effort culminated in a volume titled *The Authoritarian Personality*. Using a variety of tests and relying on more than 2,000 respondents ranging from middle-class Whites to inmates at San Quentin (California) State Prison, the authors claimed that they had isolated the characteristics of the authoritarian personality.

In these authors' view, the basic characteristics of the authoritarian personality are adherence to conventional values, uncritical acceptance of authority, and concern with power and toughness. With obvious relevance to the development of intolerance, the authoritarian personality was also characterized by aggressiveness toward people who did not conform to conventional norms or obey authority. According to

the researchers, this personality type developed from an early childhood of harsh discipline. A child with an authoritarian upbringing obeyed and then later treated others as he or she had been raised.

Exploitation Theory

Racial prejudice often is used to justify keeping a group in a subordinate position such as a lower social class. Conflict theorists, in particular, stress the role of racial/ethnic hostility as a way for the dominant group to keep its position of status and power intact. Indeed, this approach maintains that even the less affluent White working class uses prejudice to minimize competition from upwardly mobile minorities.

Exploitation theory is clearly part of the Marxist tradition in sociological thought. Karl Marx emphasized exploitation of the lower class as an integral part of capitalism. Similarly, the exploitation or conflict approach explains how racism can stigmatize a group as inferior so that the exploitation of that group can be justified. As developed by Oliver Cox, exploitation theory saw prejudice against Blacks as an extension of the inequality faced by the entire lower class.

The exploitation theory of prejudice is persuasive. Japanese Americans were the object of little prejudice until they began to enter occupations that brought them into competition with Whites. The movement to keep Chinese out of the United States became strongest during the late 19th century when Chinese immigrants and Whites fought over dwindling numbers of jobs. Both the enslavement of African Americans and the removal westward of Native Americans were, to a significant degree, economically motivated.

Although many cases support the exploitation theory, it is too limited to explain prejudice in all of its forms. First, not all minority groups are exploited economically to the same extent. Second, many groups that have been the victims of prejudice have not been persecuted for economic reasons, including the Quakers and gays and lesbians. Nevertheless, as social psychologist Gordon Allport concluded, the exploitation theory correctly points a finger at one of the factors in prejudice, namely, the rationalized self-interest of the privileged.

Normative Approach

Although personality factors are important contributors to prejudice, normative or situational factors

must also be given serious consideration. The normative approach takes the view that prejudice is influenced by societal norms and situations that encourage or discourage the tolerance of minorities.

Analysis reveals how societal influences shape a climate for tolerance or intolerance. Societies develop social norms that dictate not only what foods are desirable (or forbidden) but also what racial/ethnic groups are to be favored (or despised). Social forces operate in a society to encourage or discourage tolerance. The force may be widespread such as the pressure on White southerners to oppose racial equality while there was slavery or segregation. The influence of social norms may be limited such as when one man finds himself becoming more sexist as he competes with three women for a position in a prestigious law firm.

The four approaches to prejudice need not be mutually exclusive. Social circumstances provide cues for a person's attitudes; personality determines the extent to which people follow social cues and the likelihood that they will encourage others to do the same. Societal norms may promote or deter tolerance; personality traits suggest the degree to which people will conform to norms of intolerance. To understand prejudice, all four approaches are useful.

Measuring Prejudice

Prejudice is measured by identifying the stereotypes people use, levels of prejudice using the concept of social distance, trends in prejudice, and expressions of prejudice by members of the subordinate group.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes are unreliable generalizations about all members of a group that do not take individual differences into account. Numerous scientific studies have been made of these exaggerated images. This research has shown the willingness of people to assign positive and negative traits to entire groups of people and, in turn, to apply them to particular individuals. Stereotyping causes people to view Blacks as superstitious, Whites as uncaring, and Jews as shrewd. Over the past 70 years of such research, social scientists have found that people have become less willing to express such views openly, but prejudice persists.

If stereotypes are exaggerated generalizations, why are they so widely held and why are some traits more

often assigned than others? Evidence for traits may arise out of real conditions. For example, more Puerto Ricans live in poverty than do Whites, and so the prejudiced mind associates Puerto Ricans with laziness. According to the New Testament, some Jews were responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, and so the prejudiced mind views all Jews as Christ killers. Some activists in the women's movement are lesbians, and so the prejudiced mind sees all feminists as lesbians. From a kernel of fact, faulty generalization creates a stereotype.

Labels take on such strong significance that people often ignore facts that contradict their previously held beliefs. People who believe many Italian Americans to be members of the Mafia disregard law-abiding Italian Americans. Muslims are regularly portrayed in a violent, offensive manner that contributes to their being misunderstood and distrusted.

Do all stereotypes involve a dominant group holding ideas about subordinate groups? The answer is clearly no. White Americans even believe generalizations about themselves, although admittedly these are usually positive. Subordinate groups also hold exaggerated images of themselves. Studies before World War II showed a tendency for Blacks to assign to themselves many of the same negative traits assigned to them by Whites. Today, African Americans, Jews, Asians, and other minority groups largely reject stereotypes of themselves.

The Social Distance Scale

Robert Park and Ernest Burgess first defined social distance as the tendency to approach or withdraw from a racial group. Emory Bogardus conceptualized a scale that could measure social distance empirically. His social distance scale is so widely used that it is often called the Bogardus scale.

The scale asks people how willing they would be to interact with various racial/ethnic groups in specified social situations. The situations describe different degrees of social contact or social distance. The items used, with their corresponding distance scores, follow. People are asked whether they would be willing to work alongside, be a neighbor of, and (showing the least amount of social distance) be related through marriage. Over the 70-year period in which the tests were administered, certain patterns emerge. In the top third of the hierarchy are White Americans and Northern Europeans, held at greater social distance

are Eastern and Southern Europeans, and generally near the bottom are racial minorities.

More recently, the concept of social distance has been applied to how people actually function—for example, with whom do they hang out? In 2004, sociologists Grace Kao and Kara Joyner released a study that considered the responses of more than 90,000 adolescents nationwide on an in-school survey. Among many questions, adolescents were asked to identify their best friend and later to identify that person's race and ethnicity. Most people have as their primary friendships someone of the same race or ethnicity. Whites are the numerical majority nationwide, and more than 81% of White respondents named as their best friend someone who was also White. Other racial/ethnic group members are more likely to venture outside of their groups' boundaries.

In general, the researchers also found that among the respondents whose best friend was of a different racial/ethnic origin, they were more likely to show greater social distance; that is, they were less likely to have been in each other's homes, shared in fewer activities, and were less likely to talk about their problems with each other.

Trends in Prejudice

People hold certain images or stereotypes of each other, and they also may be more prejudiced toward some groups of people than toward others. However, is there less prejudice than there used to be? The evidence is mixed, with some indications of willingness to give up some old prejudices while new negative attitudes emerge.

Over the years, nationwide surveys have consistently shown growing support by Whites for integration, even during the southern resistance and the northern turmoil of the 1960s. National opinion surveys conducted from the 1950s and into the 21st century, with few exceptions, show an increase in the number of Whites responding positively to hypothetical situations of increased contact with African Americans. For example, 30% of the Whites sampled in 1942 believed that Blacks should not attend separate schools, but 74% supported integrated schools by 1970—and fully 93% responded in that manner in 1991.

Attitudes are still important. A change of attitude may create a context in which legislative or behavioral change can occur. Such attitude changes leading to behavior changes did occur in some areas during

the 1960s. Changes in intergroup behavior mandated by laws in housing, schools, public places of accommodation, and workplaces appear to be responsible for making some new kinds of interracial contact a social reality. Attitudes translate into votes, peer pressure, and political clout, each of which can facilitate efforts to undo racial inequality.

However, attitudes can work in the opposite direction. Surveys continue to show White Americans' resistance to affirmative action and aspects of immigration policy, including procedures that would allow illegal immigrants to become legal residents. Policy-makers, while mindful of the support that such policies have for most African Americans and Latinos, are reluctant to alienate White American voters.

Looking at White attitudes toward African Americans, two conclusions are inescapable. First, attitudes are subject to change, and dramatic shifts can occur within one generation during periods of dramatic social upheaval. Second, less progress was made during the late 20th century than was made during the 1950s and 1960s. Researchers have variously called these subtle forms of prejudice *color-blind racism*, *modern racism*, or *laissez-faire racism*. People today might not be as openly racist or prejudiced as in the past in expressing the notion that they are inherently superior to others, yet much of the opposition to policies related to eradicating poverty or immigration is a smokescreen for those who dislike entire groups of racial/ethnic minorities.

The Mood of the Oppressed

Sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois related an experience from his childhood in a largely White community in Massachusetts. He described how, on one occasion, the boys and girls were exchanging cards and everyone was having a lot of fun. One girl, a newcomer, refused his card as soon as she saw that Du Bois was Black. He wrote of feeling as if he were shut out from the Whites' world by a vast veil. In using the image of a veil, Du Bois described how members of subordinate groups learn that they are being treated differently. In his case, and in the cases of many others, this leads to feelings of contempt toward all Whites that continues for a lifetime.

Opinion pollsters have been interested in White attitudes on racial issues longer than they have measured the views of subordinate groups. This neglect of minority attitudes reflects, in part, the bias of the White researchers. It also stems from the contention

that the dominant group is more important to study because it is in a better position to act on its beliefs. National opinion surveys conducted during the 21st century have typically shown that African Americans are much less satisfied with the current situation than are White Americans and Hispanics.

The focus so far has been on one group hating another group, but there is another form of prejudice—a group may come to hate itself. Members of groups held in low esteem by society may, as a result, have low self-esteem themselves. Many social scientists once believed that members of subordinate groups hated themselves or at least had low self-esteem. Similarly, they argued that Whites had high self-esteem. High self-esteem means that individuals have fundamental respect for themselves, appreciate their own merits, and are aware of their personal faults and will strive to overcome them.

The research literature of the 1940s through the 1960s emphasized the low self-esteem of minorities. Usually, the subject was African Americans, but the argument has also been generalized to include any subordinate racial, ethnic, or nationality group. This view is no longer accepted. It should not be assumed that minority status influences personality traits in either a good way or a bad way. First, such assumptions may create a stereotype. A Black personality cannot be described any more accurately than can a White personality. Second, characteristics of minority group members are not entirely the result of subordinate racial status; they are also influenced by low incomes, poor neighborhoods, and so forth. Third, many studies of personality imply that certain values are normal or preferable, but the values chosen are those of dominant groups.

If assessments of a subordinate group's personality are so prone to misjudgments, why has the belief in low self-esteem been so widely held? Much of the research rests on studies with preschool-age Blacks who are asked to express preferences among dolls with different facial colors. Indeed, one such study, by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark, was cited in the arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court in the landmark 1954 case *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Clarks' study showed that Black children preferred White dolls, a finding suggesting that the children had developed a negative self-image. Although subsequent doll studies have sometimes shown Black children's preference for white-faced dolls, other social scientists contend that this shows a

realization of what most commercially sold dolls look like rather than documenting low self-esteem.

Because African American children, as well as children from other subordinate groups, can realistically see that Whites have more power and resources and so rate them higher does not mean that they personally feel inferior. Indeed, studies—even with children—show that when the self-images of middle-class or affluent African Americans are measured, their feelings of self-esteem are more positive than those of comparable Whites.

Because discrimination deals with actual efforts to deprive people of opportunities, it understandably receives more attention from policymakers. Reducing prejudice is important because it can lead to support for policy change.

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See Appendix B

See also Anti-Semitism; Authoritarian Personality; *Brown v. Board of Education*; Color Blindness; Contact Hypothesis; Discrimination; Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt; Eugenics; Intergroup Relations; Surveying Islamophobia; Labeling; Race, UNESCO Statements on; Racetalk; Racial Profiling; Racism; Racism, Aversive; Racism, Types of; Racism, Unintentional; Robbers Cave Experiment; Scapegoats; Social Distance; Stereotypes; Stereotype Threat; Sundown Towns; Victim Discounting; White Racism

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