

The way in which we perceive people

Sociology



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This essay will discuss the theories of prejudice and the processes of how it has been involved in people's attitudes, and how these have changed over the years. It will also look at the theories of Biological, Interpersonal and Psychoanalytic that are the origins of prejudice attitudes and try to examine ways in which this may be reduced. The focus of research on people's attitudes changes began in the 1940s and 1950s; where a particular study at that time was the persuasive communication; which was based on the use of propaganda during the Second World War.

Then come the 1950s we saw the birth of a number of theories of attitude change, and the most influential of these being Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. However according to Hogg and Vaughan (1995), in the 1960s and 1970s there was a period of decline and pessimism in attitude research, they state that this is partly due to the failure of the research methods used to measure attitudes and behaviour, but come the 1980s we saw a renewed awareness, of peoples attitude which where stimulated by the cognitive approach, attitudes at this time had a huge impact on social psychology in general.

Consequently at this time attitudes where thought to be a signify aspect of social cognition. An attitude is what you have learnt through out you life, it is an evaluation of your beliefs, but where there is attitude you will find prejudice and discrimination towards different groups of people. So what is prejudice and discrimination? Prejudice and discrimination are negative manifestations of integrative power, instead of belonging or holding people together, prejudice and discrimination push them apart. The word prejudice

comes from two other words; pre (which means before or ahead of time) and judge.

Prejudice is a bias for, or more usually against, an individual, gender, or a particular social group without just grounds. Theories of motivation influenced by the work of Freud have treated prejudiced behaviour as aggression that has been displaced from its proper target to low-status social groups as a safe outlet. The best known of these theories is The Authoritarian Personality (1950) by the German social theorist Theodor Adorno. This theory looked for an explanation of Nazi anti-Semitism in a rigid and repressive family upbringing which led children to admire power but also to develop displaced hostility.

The view that stereotypes typify the oversimplification, common to all human thinking about categories, (for example: - a person's perception) that has led to modern cognitive theories of prejudice, particularly the social identity theory. One of the recent studies on social identity theories, of prejudice, was developed by the British psychologists, Henri Tajfel (1919-1982). In his theory Tajfel argued that belonging to a group is sufficient to make one prejudiced against other groups (out groups). He suggested that human thought naturally categorizes objects in both in both the social and non-social world.

Many people's self-concept includes assumptions about their membership of social categories or groups such as gender and race. These constitute their social identity, and to maintain self-esteem people tend to regard categories or groups to which they belong as better than those to which they do not

belong. Many empirical findings support the theory, but experiments have resulted in contradictory predictions about its effects. Although the theory predicts that those whose identification with a group is strongest should show most bias, this is not the case in practice.

When people are put into stereotypes it is an over-simplified definition of a social group, organization, or nation that provides a convenient but invariable image. Stereotypes encourage simplistic judgements, and they are often used in the mass media because they provide instantly recognised cues, but their constant repetition may be highly prejudicial to identified groups such as Blacks or homosexual people, Jews, American tourists, trade unionists and so on. Propaganda makes use of stereotypes in order to reinforce prejudice against targeted groups.

A common stereotype is that people who wear glasses are more interested in studying and are far more intelligent than people who don't wear glasses. This stereotype may make a person prejudiced in favour of anyone who wears glasses. Even though this is a stereotype that may not hurt anyone, it is still a prejudgment that doesn't take into account the facts. If you were to ask an optician what distinguishes people who wear glasses from those who don't, he is likely to tell you that the only thing people who wear glasses have in common is their poor eyesight.

Prejudice, then, is an attitude or belief that is formed and held without really considering the facts. It is a readiness to respond in a certain way (either negatively or positively) towards certain people or certain situations.

Prejudices are part of our frame of reference or way of looking at the world

that we don't think about or question. This is because our prejudices are based on ideas we believe are true and which are often a part of society's general beliefs. When prejudices are examined carefully and with an open mind, however, they can all be shown to be based on faulty or incomplete information.

There are also many other types of prejudice that cause daily suffering for millions - prejudice against people who hold certain religious beliefs, or against the handicapped, the elderly, and women. Think of all the suffering and wars that are going on in the world right now between people of different races, religions, nationalities, and political beliefs! Much of this suffering can be avoided if people would approach each other with an open mind that withholds judgment until all the facts are known.

Our prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory actions affect how we will see people and things they do in the future. We tend to see things that support our worldview, and we ignore the rest. In this way, developing prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory actions in one situation makes it easier to be prejudiced in other situations; we can call this process the vicious cycle of prejudice. Providing accurate information is not enough to change a person's view, prejudice, is based on feelings as much as it is on ideas, these must be changed if we are to overcome prejudice views in the future.

If we are to try and change people's attitude towards prejudice, then we must start this process from birth and try to bring babies and young children up to believe that all people are equal. This could be further developed with in our education and practice. It may also be reduced by equal status contact

between majority and minority groups where we would be in pursuit of common goals. This would be greatly enhanced if the law, the government and local atmosphere, sanctioned it.

Let's hope that through education and practice we can begin to look at people as they are, not what we think they are. Discrimination occurs when prejudice is translated into actions. The refusal to rent an apartment on the basis of his/her race is an example of discrimination, as was the extermination of six million Jews by Nazi Germany. It is the unfavourable or unequal treatment of people based on their membership in a certain group. A few years ago a sociologist decided to perform a little experiment to test discrimination against Indians.

He collected advertisements from two Toronto newspapers about holiday resorts in Canada. To these approximately one hundred resorts he wrote two letters, signing one of them with the same name Mr. Smith and the other of them with the name Mr. Little Bear. The two letters were mailed on the same day and asked for rooms for the same dates. About 95 of the resorts answered Mr. Smith's letters and 93% of them offered him a room in their hotel or motel. But only 52% of these same resorts answered Mr. Little Bear's letters.

Only 20% of the resorts offered him a room. This study illustrates a case of discrimination because hotel managers were acting on their prejudiced views of Native people. While most provinces have laws (human rights legislation) aimed at preventing discrimination, these laws do not try to change people's attitudes. They only try to stop them from hurting people because of these

attitudes. This study is similar to one conducted by the Canadian civil Liberties Association which asked for rooms in the names of Mr. Greenberg (a Jewish name) and Mr. Lockwood.

The results were similar, but 36% offered accommodation to Mr. Greenberg compared with 20% to Mr. Little Bear. Sigmund Freud's revolutionary ideas have set the standard for modern psychoanalysis in which students of psychology can learn from his ideas spread from the field of medicine to daily living. Freud's studies in the areas such as unconsciousness, dreams, sexuality, the Oedipus complex, and sexual maladjustments laid the foundation for future studies. In result, better understanding of the small things, which shape our lives (Jung).

Psychoanalysis is the name of a procedure for the investigation of mental processes that are almost inaccessible in any other way, a method (based upon that investigation) for the treatment of neurotic disorders and a collection of psychological information obtained along these lines, which is gradually being accumulated into new scientific discipline (Freud).

Psychoanalysis a theory of and therapy for the mental disorders known as neuroses, and a general theory of personality and emotional development constructed almost entirely by Freud.

This theory is one to one, over an extended period, and investigates the interaction between the conscious and, by free association of ideas, the unconscious mind and bringing to light repressed fears and conflicts. This theory has been of enormous influence in the 20th century thinking and culture. It has given a central role to the drives of instinct and the way that

socialisation may prevent such drives through too much indulgence or control. Psychoanalysis stresses that instincts and emotions may remain, unacknowledged, in the unconscious and profoundly affect thought and behaviour.

Freud believed that instincts from childhood onwards resolve around physical gratification and are broadly sexual. Subsequently, however, he suggested that we have destructive as well asexual instincts. The Austrian-British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882-1960) took this idea of thanatos (death) and Eros (love) much further; her work with children is probably the most important contribution to psychoanalysis after Freud. The theory of psychoanalysis, which is arguably the most inclusive in psychology, has fundamental conceptual weaknesses. Many claims are impossible to test or experiment, or, where tested, have not been confirmed.

Sigmund Freud's work can have an effect on all people's lives if they know what his work has done and if they take a moment to analyse their own lives. Freud laid the foundation for modern psychoanalysis so that students of psychology could study and expand on his ideas ("APSA"). His ideas were groundbreaking and were not like anything that anyone had ever heard of. Although never accorded full recognition during his lifetime, Freud is generally acknowledged as one of the creative minds of modern times (Leland). All of his theories can be directly related back to people and applied to everyday life.

Because of Freud, people can step back and look at exactly what their thoughts mean and what their mind is trying to tell them. In all the examples

in which Freud psychoanalysed, he went through a particular system; he chose the best way to manipulate every psychological move. In any psychologist, they have their own way of dealing with the troubled; they have worked for so many years, to find the best curriculum to go through. In result, psychologists use their own psychoanalysis. " I am actually not a man of science at all... I am nothing but a conquistador by temperament, an adventurer" (Freud).

The theory of social categorization states that it is human nature to put people into categories based on certain characteristics. Which is also how we form stereotypes. Stereotypes give us a preconceived notion of how people of a certain group are going to act before we have experienced it first hand, basically stereotypes are generalizations, but they may apply to some members of a particular group but definitely not to everyone. Another theory, illusory correlation, states that we tend to notice unusual behaviour that occurs in the minority of groups rather than the same behaviour that would occur in a majority group.

One of the theories that are most interesting is the social-identity theory, which states that people are prejudice in order to increase their self-esteem by believing that other groups are inferior to them. In the 1940's and 1950's ethology set out to explain our behaviour in terms of its evolutionary history and adaptive function. Sociobiology grew up round discussions of various apparent anomalies of Darwin's evolutionary theory such as altruism, described as sociobiology's 'central theoretical problem' in Edward Wilson's *Sociobiology, the New Synthesis* (1975).

Sociobiological assumptions about adaptive ness and biological selfishness in human behaviour, however fraught with difficulties because human culture may act as a buffer against evolutionary mechanisms and moral or legal prescriptions determine some of our actions. Nevertheless sociobiology attempts to explain aspects of human sexuality and parental behaviour as well as altruism. In conclusion, after reading about the different theories on prejudice, you will see that it is a combination of all the theories mentioned above, and that the way a person is brought up strongly ties into their beliefs.

If a child is brought up listening to his/her parents talking negatively about a certain group of people it often leads to the child having the same beliefs as their parents. Another possible cause is if someone has a bad or traumatizing experience, for instance if someone is robbed by a person of a different race they may then believe that everyone of that race is a thief and so therefore they will form a prejudice against that group of people. Our prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory actions affect how we will see people and things they do in the future.

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Lets hope that through education and practice we can begin to look at people as they are, not what we think they are. Experience plays an important factor in why some people become prejudice or not. Imagine you have grown up on a farm in the highlands of Scotland, your whole life, and you have never seen or met an African American person first hand, but throughout your whole life you have been told that they are terrible people who deal in drugs and murder innocent people.

Although you have never experienced them first hand, automatically you will have a negative outlook on that group of people, your different experiences and what you have been taught plays a big role in the prejudices that you have formed. Usually if you are immersed by all different kinds of people and have known people from different cultures, you will tend to have a more open mind. Ignorance is the biggest reason for why we form prejudices in the first place. If we think back to the fifties and sixties, the amount of prejudice and racial discrimination has been reduced dramatically.

However, as much as society tries to stress the importance of equality there is still a great amount of discrimination still going on in the world. It has been

assumed that contact between members of different racial groups will reduce prejudice and racism. Contact does produce more positive attitudes, but the improvement may not extend beyond the context where contact occurs (school or workplace), and contact in settings that confirm stereotypes or increase hostility may increase prejudice.

One of the first thoughts that come to mind is that a major part of this process is to educate people from a very young age, about prejudice and how they need to be open to all types of people. Schools need to be culturally diversified so that a child can experience other types of people firsthand. This is not going to be as simple as it sounds, especially when you put into perspective financial situations and where schools are located, but it is important that from a young age people experience all types of cultures.

Another way in which to educate people is by stressing that people are all different, wither it is the way they dress or the way they talk. So instead of looking down on other people's differences we need to be taught to celebrate them. Prejudice is something that still plagues our society, yet it has definitely improved over time and if things keep progressing, prejudice could possibly cease to exist in the future, as long as we keep educating our children and society, we will be heading towards the right track.