Reducing prejudice in society

A major problem still occurring in today's society is prejudice. We can observe this in the wide ranges of evidence available. . It is still reported to be in any institution such as school or work and can be learnt from how we see others. The current paper intends to explore and revise the literature that can be found surrounding the topic. Prejudice and discrimination are a reflection of how others respond to people of another group and reflect their affective, behavioural and cognitive reactions to the people within these different groups. The literature surrounding this topic is vast, so this review will focus on a specific strand gathered from the literature surrounding prejudice and concentrate on prejudice reduction within society.

Where does it start?

There is a negative thought pattern that occurs in early childhood as according to Klein (1992.) Media and books contain stereotyping and thus it is this that creates the foundation for prejudicing occurring in adults. Degner and Wentura (2010) carried out a study that looked at the automatic activation of prejudice in children and adolescents (9 years to 15 years.) There was a continuous pattern suggesting a linear developmental increase of automatic prejudice with significant effects of outgroup negativity which only appeared surrounding 12 to 13 year olds. However, results of younger children showed no indication of automatic prejudice activation. These results suggest that although children are assumed to acquire prejudice at much younger ages, automatization of negative attitudes may well be related to developmental processes in early adolescence. What society views as beautiful is controlled by the media through magazines etc.

An article called " Preventing Prejudice: A Guide for Counsellors, Educators, and Parents", written by Ponterotto, Utsey, and Pedersen (2006) gave a very useful insight. This piece of literature covers a range of topics on reducing prejudice, one being the roles and responsibilities of those in a position to reduce prejudice; such as teachers and counsellors etc. This is a view which is also shared by many others, who agree that the classroom is where the early signs of prejudice are seen and it is there that they should be alleviated. This would be a direct approach by the teacher. Pate (1995) believed that the teacher should instruct the students to take part in anti-prejudice programs by reading informative books on the topic, integrating a weekly class to enlighten the students and such other activities. However Pate did admit this was not a successful tactic as students may begrudge the instructions and thus strengthening a prejudice therefore, delayed measures are the only resolution to create an attitude change with the direct approach being used in the long-run.

Teachers have the power and means to implement prejudice reduction techniques. This is a statement many claim, such as Dessel (2010), and could be perceived as being straight forward and true. However, there is still a lack of demonstration of this in action as something which can be repeated in any school. Again other literature from Pate indicates that the cognitive approach's principle is that people can reduce prejudice if they know more about other groups and think more clearly. Pate (1995) stated that various intervention efforts which include; empathy as well as an increase in knowledge and consideration of other groups, different in several ways from the students, are effective. Other studies also share this view about the

effectiveness of the cognitive approach in prejudice reduction. For instance, Katz and Zalk (1978) found the ability to recognize and accept differences amongst member groups could promote prejudice reduction. Other classroom approaches might also work in reducing prejudice. Some examples of this alternative are;" semantics, counter-stereotype approach, cultural immersion, the study of cultural anthropology, developing instructional materials and value clarification" (Pate, 1995).

The common problem is still a lack of evidence and design flaws. Bigler (1999) noted that prejudice reduction research has encountered limitations due to problems with the design of many studies. Some of these include an overly simplistic model, bias in the measuring of attitudes and a want for longitudinal studies in order to ascertain if there are any sustainable effects from the reduction strategies. Some studies in the literature have actually reported that, even though strategies are implemented for reducing prejudice, there are " troubling effects . . . of increased racial bias among children" (Bigler 1999.) Copious amounts of literature display programs and schemes of how they can theoretically reduce prejudice from an early age such as Weston (1990.) The study claimed that carefully chosen reduction tactics incorporated into the current curriculum can reduce prejudice. This however is claimed by many theorists in different ways, although the study didn't prove to have any valid evidence to back up the theory.

Other researchers have admitted there is a repetition in the guidelines as to how we can reduce prejudice. Work carried out by Parrens (2007) does give a good background on prejudice and is insightful stating that the reduction of malignant prejudice is the responsibility of society. However this

investigation lacks the presence of new research, as much already exists in the vast amount of literature available. Even so, it does highlight some factors which have been brought up before to reduce prejudice but underlines a new importance of these factors where they had previously not been counted as substantially important and discusses them further. The focus in much of the literature was on intervention in early children to eradicate prejudice; however this focus has been modified to ensure the inclusion of how social motivational processes and other aspects of a child's social interactions can influence them in their attitude towards prejudice. (Social Identity Development Theory (SIDT), (Davis et al 2007). Much of the literature includes theories to reduce prejudice; however Dovidio & Gaertner (1993) found that the traditional methods and techniques included in such literature may not actually be very effective in reducing prejudice.

As indicated by the material available in psychology, intergroup contact seems to be an essential means of reducing prejudice. Allport's (1954) contact theory argues that four major conditions must be met to effectively reduce prejudice. Pettigrew (1998) expanded on Allport's theory in his intergroup contact theory by adding another condition of friendship potential. " Optimal intergroup contact requires time for cross-group friendships to develop" (Pettigrew, 1998)

A study was conducted to examine the conflict and prejudice between Israelis and Palestinians. The existing prejudice here was reported to have furthered the development and preservation of two major groups living in direct resistance and antagonism. Stephen et al (2004) conducted such studies. Although the research seems promising in its effort to attempt to

discourage and remove prejudicial stereotyping in small groups, literature has several limitations which need to be taken into account. It focused primarily on reducing prejudice between Israelis and Palestinians. This therefore evokes concern as to whether or not there can be a generalization towards conflict in other populations. Each population is different and different underlying issues exist, therefore the mentioned interventions may not necessarily be appropriate to all populations, leading to a possible requirement for adjusting according to the population. The literature also faltered in its lack of longitudinal research. From the study the results indicated desired effects; however these could very well only be short term. Bargal (2008) reasoned for adopting a long-range research design, monitoring the study over time, as opposed to it being a short-term intervention. Evidently, more research is required in this area in order to determine whether or not these interventions discussed, offer long lasting effects in terms of conflict resolution and reducing stereotypes and prejudice effectively.

Conclusion

Most of the literature informs us that the classroom is the best place to reduce prejudice due to the earliness of which it is recognized and can be manipulated. This then proposes that the students can learn empathy and other desirable emotions towards those who are different to them which could lead to unnecessary feelings of " us versus them," a classic in-group versus out-group situation. According to literature, by the age of 10 a child may quickly develop a prejudiced attitude due to this becoming autonomous (Yee and Brown (1992), Rutland (1999) and Rutland et al (2005.) However,

to validate this claim, more research should be conducted with a certain concentration on the age differences and the environment at home, which may breed hostile attitudes, in turn strengthening a prejudice tendency. The literature should use more of a qualitative based method and data, as opposed to the vast amount of quantitative data, to determine if the results reinforce the existing records.

Again since the main reduction strategies are poorly supported by valid studies, they are merely suggestions, insufficiently backed up by research. The studies on these strategies are vague, lacking needed specifics on certain focuses such as gender, age and individual background. Future studies should aim to include a larger focus on strategies involving education and eliciting self-control and should particularly attempt to refer to different types of race and ethnicity. One such piece of literature seemed to demonstrate the best understanding of prejudice reduction tactics by offering field tested tools to determine ways to reduce it. This was written by Ponterotto et al (2006) as discussed above. However since this is one piece of literature, more needs to be focused on not just what prejudice is and the fact that it can be overcome, but to actually display studies of these reductions in action.