

Prejudice as a human trait and its transition in society

[Science](#), [Biology](#)



In this essay we are identifying prejudice as a human trait and how it has transitioned in society and manifests itself in various walks of life. Prejudice is one of the more well-known albeit less understood aspects of human nature and it has been observed or studied since the early 20th century. With due regard to its complexity certain character traits of prejudiced individuals are outlined which help us understand the concepts of categorization and stereotyping. These two concepts play an important role in outlining the traits of prejudice. As humans we learn and grow by evaluating all aspects of our environment. This becomes the foundation of subconscious and conscious social categorization.

Stereotyping of personalities or communities or groups also arises due to categorization on a higher level. Social distrust between two entities will gradually reduce as both sides are exposed to each other however it takes a very long period of time to observe any drastic change in the human society as it is built on basic core values and ideologies that have been transferred from generation to generation. Essay (Myers, Abell, & Sani, 2014) Prejudice as a subject of Social Psychology has been studied since 1920's. The concerning factors in this era were race and racism.

In his classic book *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport (1954) offered a unique definition for ethnic prejudice when he suggested "it is ill thinking of others without sufficient warrant" (Allport 1954) and he also says it "is antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalization" (Allport 1954) (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017) The word prejudice is defined as "Preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience." As per (Myers, Abell, & Sani, 2014) regarding prejudice "It is to prejudge an

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individual on the basis of their membership to a group due to general dislike towards it for no reason which eventually leads to discriminating behaviour.”

The biased nature of behaviour caused by prejudice generates ill feeling within one's environment. Prejudiced individuals behave in a discriminating way towards individuals that are unlike themselves and of who they disapprove them for not being as they are. They may feel threatened by these persons with different personas and have no awareness of their bias hence categorising them as dangerous or spiteful. (Allport, 1954, p9)

mentioned that few researchers have defined an additional trait of prejudice which is; people with prejudiced mindset are the way they are if an individual defies traditional ways of a culture which would make the individual appear to be a threat or as the one opposing the currents of the wave. (Allport, 1954) In an experiment listed in Allport's book “ The Nature of Prejudice”, judges were asked to classify comments written by several ninth-grade children showing the degree of prejudice.

The inferences from this experiment were quite interesting as they illustrated a subtle and important outcome via the statements said by boys against the girls or comments made against teachers or figures of authority was not measured as prejudice as it is a tendency for younger children to be overly critical of their own gender counterparts or figures of authority as a display of childish rebelliousness. In contrast it was also observed as prejudice if the children had expressed acrimony towards races, labour union groups or nationalities other than their own. The judges viewed this

unacceptance of social classes races or nationalities as prejudiced rather than rebellious as in the first illustration.

The outcomes of prejudice in this research are subtle, as prejudice progresses it can lead to leaving a drastic impact on the civilization. Another example stated in this book explains, the Indian caste system, which appeared to be merely devised to enhance efficient social division on the basis of wealth, income and spiritual traits. Instead it created discrimination between different castes, including the excommunication of the untouchables due to their supposed failure to progress to superior sectors of caste. One may wonder if prejudice was actually absent in the ancient Indian caste system as it was formulated on the basis of equality of segregation and categorization of society. Let us observe what role social categorization plays in this segregation of the Indian caste system. We can define social categorization as quoted in the following text book: (Social Psychology, second edition, (Myers, Abell & Sani 2014) “ Social categorization is defined as the cognitive partitioning of the social world into relatively discrete categories of individuals”.

It is also stated that social categorization is one of the foremost psychological tools available to comprehend human beings and their behaviour. Due to the intricate variances in the social environments that humans thrive in, they categorize individuals they interact with into various groups or categories. This categorization is an essential element of human survival and ultimately manifests its character in the form of social stereotyping. (Myers, Abell, & Sani, 2014) Stereotyping means generalizing

our opinion about the features of a person, community or group.

Assumptions that arise due to categorization or in some cases stereotyping would be classified as prejudice as they are mere assumptions made about the individual or group.

These assumptions or beliefs however may flame prejudice. ((Myers, Abell & Sani, 2014) They promote a generalized belief about the characteristics of people in a group situation and attribute those characteristics on the basis of group membership. These definitions of categorization and stereotyping blend well within the foundations of the Indian caste system as individuals presumed to be a part of certain groups were assigned to play a certain role in society and not deviate from their path. It was hence considered to be socially acceptable to stay in the assigned caste and not try anything besides the activities pursued by the members of that group. Individuals that belonged to one caste had prejudiced feelings towards those of another, this caused discrimination and ill feelings in an otherwise to be termed as perfect caste system. (Myers, Abell & Sani, 2014, P541) has been observed that as humans we automatically and consciously stereotype the people we meet in our day to day lives.

The brain and its various functions help us do the same due to the nature of our surroundings (Correll et al., 2006; Cunningham et al., 2004; Eberhardt 2005). (Myers, Abell & Sani, 2014) Let us consider an analysis conducted by social scientists Anthony Greenwald and Eric Schuh (1994). They analysed the citations of social science articles written by persons with non-Jewish names and Jewish names. They compared Jewish authors with non-Jewish

ones. Their conclusions were based on researching close to 30, 000 citations and these also included research of 17, 000 prejudice journals. The astonishing outcomes of this research were that non-Jewish authors cited non-Jewish names by 40 per cent more than Jewish authors, but that they could not decipher if non-Jewish authors were citing non-Jewish names more or Jewish authors were citing Jewish names more or was there a possibility of over citation on either side.

The degree of prejudice in this experiment was difficult to assign as there seemed to be merely equal prejudice on both sides of the experiment. Prejudice can be subtle in society and difficult to identify as it could exist as an underlying phenomenon while portraying a stable outward appearance. We can observe this with the Canadian immigration pattern, (Reitz, 2012) Canada has always had a reputation of being a multicultural nation where the Canadian citizens naturally embrace diversity and this has enabled them to flaunt multiculturalism and smooth integration of skilled migrants into the Canadian system. This society however has traces of discrimination and racism which were observed from the numbers of the Ethnic Diversity Survey which included interviews in groups of various ethnic origins across the entire country. It was also observed that the minority groups were did not have a sense of belonging to the new country as compared to white migrants in the same scenario.

In order to measure accurate details about the migrants the survey comprised of details pertaining to patriotism towards Canada, having a sense of belonging to the community, desire to obtain citizenship which would lead

to voting rights and general fulfillment in life post the migration phase. Out of the migrants of minor ethnic groups that chose to participate in the survey, thirty per cent related to calling themselves. Canadian and identified themselves as being part of society. 30 percent of the minor ethnic groups bother to cast their vote the others avoid it merely as they do not want to rather than because they are unable to (most minor ethnic group migrants are given citizenship faster than their European counterparts). Thus, concluding there are noteworthy missing links in the wellbeing of migrants from minor ethnic groups and this feeling of not belonging to the community becomes more prominent in society as their tenure increases the intensity of the feeling of not belonging builds up.

Notable evidence from the research also states that the racial bias increases for the children of migrants (those who are born to migrant parents) in Canada. The policies that glorify the multicultural belief in the Canadian system has not reaped the desired outcomes with ethnic cultural minorities however this system has worked seamlessly for the European origin migrants as a result the divide in racial groups is significantly visible in the Canadian society. (Myers, Abell & Sani, 2014, P 547) The Robbers Cave experiment was an excellent example of how to manipulate and control prejudice however this was a highly controlled environment and the real implications of such a situation will be difficult to interpret.

The experiment was conducted in a summer camp between eleven to twelve-year-old white American boys, the experiment initially involved three phases. The first phase involved the mingling of the camp participants where

the boys get acquainted with each other and they develop friendships out of their own free will and personalities. The second phase was one where they were now divided into two units and they experienced a sense of unity within their respective group. The third phase was a mere competition where one unit had to outsmart the other to gain any resources that were required. Gradually a fourth phase was introduced where the two units had to work in sync with each other to attain any positive benefits for all of them. The results of this experiment were as expected in a way where once the two units were formed the rivalry between them led to resentments between them. The members of both units had preconceived ideas and notions about members of the opposition. The units had high levels of animosity against each other and hence preferred to disengage and not associate together. The researchers also made a notable observation that as the two units were faced with each other they stopped vicious acts against one another and they also stopped considering themselves inferior to the other group. It was also observed that the groups worked together to common benefit. This clearly illustrates on an experimental level that the prejudice could be reduced through interaction or mere awareness of the ways and means of the foreign entity. (Allport, 1954) After researching several aspects of prejudice and its outcome discrimination, it was concluded via multiple experiments that these two traits are a part of society and the individual's personality as illustrated earlier (Myers, Abell, & Sani, 2014) humans do categorize other individuals subconsciously and consciously. The society we live in also has several reservations of what is acceptable and what is not. In a broader perspective we may accept that these traits coexist in society.

Thus, reinforcing the possibility of having various ways of educating individuals about diversity and tackling these traits in every possible way. (Corrigan, Edwards, Green, Diwan, & Penn, 2001) Based on studies conducted on indifferent or prejudiced behaviour towards individuals with mental conditions, several remarkable observations were noted. Individuals who had encountered relatives or friends or people with mental illness were not to prejudiced towards mental illness and its effects. It was also documented that individuals from minor ethnic groups did not support any bias towards people with mental illness. (Fiske1998) It was also noted that minor cultural groups, who often felt treated unfairly by the others were not accustomed to enacting prejudice on any other groups.

According to the research-based articles and experiments listed above it is possible to conclude that prejudice does exist in societies in some way or the other. However, its intensity reduces in a small range and the desired outcome is only observable over decades or generations making it seem like there has been no change at all. Prejudice may seem to exist at the same level as observed several years ago with the Indian caste system or immigration related issues in Canada when it comes to assimilating in the social order. (Myers, Abell & Sani 2014) Prejudice still exists as categorization is an essential trait of human behaviour and it creates a bias in different aspects of life due to this an observable change is not easily achievable.