

Two theories that
explain prejudice
discrimination and
stereotyping
psychology es...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Contemporary Social Psychology largely follows Allport's 1954 definition of prejudice; " Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalisation. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole or toward an individual because he/she is a member of that group" (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

Social Cognitive approaches to the understanding of prejudice focus on aspects of individual psychological functioning. Mostly these are aspects of how individuals process information about themselves and others. Analyses of cognition are closely related to those of personality and therefore personality theories are influential approaches to the study of prejudice, one such theory is The Authoritarian Personality (Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue, 2006). The term Authoritarian Personality was first developed by Adorno et al in 1950; these researchers were eager to find an explanation for the rise in fascism in Germany and examined the psychological factors which allowed the regime to operate (Augoustinos et al, 2006). Adorno et al identified nine different dimensions which together he argued defined Authoritarianism. Of these he believed three to be most important; Conventionalism, Authoritarian submission and Authoritarian aggression. The first of these described a rigid adherence to conventional, middle class values, the second encouraged submissive, uncritical attitudes towards idealised moral authorities of the in-group and the third described a tendency to be on the lookout for, and to condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional values (Augoustinos et al, 2006). It is argued by Adorno et al that Authoritarian personalities are created due to a combination of particular patterns in child rearing and family structure.

Research investigating the origins of authoritarianism has examined authoritarian beliefs within families. Parents and their college-age children in the U. S. and Canada tend to have similar levels. This similarity is likely to be due to environmental factors, specifically, that children learn authoritarian beliefs from their parents (Altemeyer, 1998). At the same time, results from twin studies suggest that authoritarianism may be, in part, genetic (McCourt et al, 1999). Authoritarian families are typically hierarchically organised with a strict father figure, it has been found that those with an Authoritarian personality are more prone to prejudices of all kinds. In particular Authoritarian types are prejudiced against racial and ethnic minorities, women and homosexuals (West & Livy, 2002). Whitley (1999) suggests some variability in prejudice levels among people holding the authoritarian belief system. He found that White American heterosexuals scoring high on authoritarianism were more willing to admit being more prejudiced toward homosexuals than toward racial or ethnic groups. This may possibly be related to their religion which generally supports prejudice toward homosexuals and discourages prejudice toward other groups.

The Authoritarian Personality has been criticised on both theoretical and methodological grounds; Minard (1952) criticised Adorno et al's work on the basis that despite some regions and social settings experiencing notorious prejudice and discrimination they were no more afflicted by authoritarianism than those regions where there was little prejudice.(as cited in Augoustinos et al, 2006)

The theory was revamped by Altemeyer in 1981 who reasoned that there was little evidence to support the existence of Adorno et al's nine different

<https://assignbuster.com/two-theories-that-explain-prejudice-discrimination-and-stereotyping-psychology-essay/>

dimensions and instead suggested the only reliably identifiable dimensions were those three which Adorno deemed most important (Augoustinos et al, 2006). Unlike Adorno, Altemeyer argued that children are born authoritarian; he contends that the problem which needs to be described, explained, and understood is how children lose their authoritarianism and become tolerant. Altemeyer assumes that through experience, i. e. having contact with minorities, gays, radicals and so on, children lose their authoritarianism. According to Altemeyer it is especially true of adolescents, who are often treated unfairly by authorities (Augoustinos et al, 2006). This view is the opposite of Adorno et al and most social psychological research on prejudice which believe we are born with tolerance and the issue to be addressed is prejudice. Altemeyer developed the theory into one which explains how individuals become shaped by their social experiences to come to have one orientation to established patterns of authority. However he also separated the construct of authoritarianism and fascism therefore not allowing an explanation into how a nation can come to embrace a totalitarian form of political and social organisation, such as Germany during the Second World War (Augoustinos et al, 2006).

The authoritarian personality was revamped again by Duckitt in 1992 when he stated that a single construct could describe and explain all three of Altemeyer's dimensions, making the theory much more concise. He suggested that;

“ Each [dimension] can be seen as an expression of an intense (and insecure) identification with one or more important social groups (usually national, ethnic, tribal or societal) and a consequent emphasis on and <https://assignbuster.com/two-theories-that-explain-prejudice-discrimination-and-stereotyping-psychology-essay/>

demand for group cohesion. Authoritarianism can therefore be defined as a set of beliefs organised around the normative expectation that the purely personal needs, inclinations and values of group members should be subordinated as completely as possible to the cohesion of the group and its requirements" (as cited in Augoustinos et al, 2006).

Duckitt's new construct provided a number of advantages over both Adorno et al's and Altemeyer's approaches. Firstly it explains why Altemeyer's three dimensions co-vary; it reinstates the link between authoritarianism and fascism and it helps explain why authoritarianism is related to prejudice. To expand on this latter point, Duckitt argues that authoritarianism and prejudice are joined through the mediating influence of social identity (Duckitt, 1992).

However, one area of Duckitt's work which is deficient is his mention of " an intense and insecure identification..." Fascism requires identification with particular groups, especially the nation but also with " racial" groups, it is only intense and insecure identification with some groups which matter. Perhaps, also, the identification of some groups within a social hierarchy. This drawback with Duckitt's work led to the interest in Social Dominance Theory (Augoustinos et al, 2006).

Social dominance orientation refers to the belief in and support for a natural hierarchy among individuals and groups. People who strongly believe in SDO are interested in promoting the superiority of their in-group over any out-groups and have a general support for hierarchies. It appears to be a universal phenomenon as it has been corroborated in the U. S., Israel, and

China (Pratto et al., 2000). There is also evidence that culture may influence the presence of SDO; in general, people in higher status positions, i. e. are dominant, are more likely to have strong levels of SDO than those in lower status positions (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). SDO is associated with negative attitudes toward policies that promote equality across gender, social class, ethnic or racial groups, and sexual orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

SDO and Authoritarianism have been extensively studied in the prejudice domain (Nicol, 2009). A consistent body of research shows that the two are powerfully but independently associated with many forms of prejudice and intergroup aggression (Henry et al, 2001). In North America, it has been found that sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism are linked more to high levels of SDO than the authoritarianism belief. Authoritarianism only appears to predict prejudice against homosexuals more strongly (Altemeyer, 1998). Whitley (1999) suggests that people who strongly agree with SDO preserve their power, status, and resources by keeping other groups at a disadvantage. That is, people who strongly agree with SDO use stereotypes to justify the oppression of out-groups, and those stereotypes lead to negative feelings about those out-groups, resulting in prejudice and discrimination.

It has been suggested that Authoritarianism and SDO have different motivational bases for prejudice; Duckitt (2001) proposed a dual process theory of ideology and prejudice, where Authoritarians focused on the perceived threat to their in-group values in a dangerous world and where people with high SDO focused on the perceived threat to their in-group status in a competitive world. Therefore the two constructs are similar on the <https://assignbuster.com/two-theories-that-explain-prejudice-discrimination-and-stereotyping-psychology-essay/>

surface but cause and create prejudice through different means (as cited in Augoustinos et al, 2006)

Social Dominance Orientation, although classed as a personality based theory is actually more strongly linked to social identity approaches.

Moreover, the theoretical basis of SDO was provided by The SIT (Augoustinos et al, 2006). There have been strong debates over the similarities and differences between SDO and SIT; Social Identity Theorists argue that there are fundamental incompatibilities between the two theories, focusing on the degree to which SDO is situationally invariant. However, SDO theorists counter that critics are misinformed and do not fully understand the nature of Social Dominance Orientation (Augoustinos et al, 2006).

SIT is one of the most significant theories of group processes and intergroup relations worldwide. Over time the theory has evolved and been refined, however, SIT has been open to misinterpretation due to its quick rise to “ fame” (Hornsey, 2008). SIT has, in the past been interpreted to imply that prejudice, stereotyping, and other forms of negative intergroup relations are inevitable (Augoustinos et al, 2006) and is known for its strong focus on how social contexts can affect relationships between groups. Therefore it seems ironic that the theory was developed using experiments in which all context was stripped away (Hornsey, 2008).

Social Identity Theory was developed by Tajfel et al in the early 1970s; he aimed to discover if merely placing people into groups would instigate discrimination. Participants were allocated into groups on the basis of meaningless and random criteria, such as on the flip of a coin, as one study

by Billig & Tajfel (1973) (as cited in Hornsey, 2008). Participants then had to distribute points to members of their own group and to members of the out-group. As there was no interaction among group members even within their group and the knowledge that they could not benefit from their point allocation strategy it might, therefore, have been expected that the participants would have acted randomly or fairly. Instead, participants tended to give more points to members of their own group than to members of the out-group (Hornsey, 2008).

Tajfel's results that people will discriminate against others with no justification other than they are in a different group is in slight contrast with the Authoritarian approach which suggests people are prejudiced against others when they do not follow the same conventional patterns of values and morals.

It was initially argued that the participants were obeying a norm of competitive group behaviour. Tajfel argued that human interaction ranges on a spectrum from being purely interpersonal, (people relating entirely as individuals, with no awareness of social categories) on the one hand to purely intergroup, (people relating entirely as representatives of their groups, where one's individualising qualities are overwhelmed by the importance of one's group) on the other (Hornsey, 2008). Tajfel argued that being placed into an "us" and "them" situation changes peoples' behaviour and makes them act differently to those not in their group. When in a group, peoples' natural instinct is to make as many distinctions between their group and other groups, as it enables them to have a sense of "social identity"

(Hornsey, 2008). This links to the view that people high on SDO use <https://assignbuster.com/two-theories-that-explain-prejudice-discrimination-and-stereotyping-psychology-essay/>

stereotypes to widen the gap between their group and others and those stereotypes lead to negative feelings about the out-groups, resulting in prejudice and discrimination (Whitley, 1999).

There is a psychological discontinuity between people acting as individuals and people acting as group members, as Asch's (1951) studies showed, people in groups will conform to the majority vote, leaving their own morals, judgements and values behind (as cited by Friend, Rafferty & Bramel, 1990). Allport (1954) recognized that attachment to one's in-group does not necessarily require hostility towards outgroups. Findings from both cross-cultural research and laboratory experiments support the alternative view that ingroup identification is independent of negative attitudes toward outgroups and that much ingroup bias and intergroup discrimination is motivated by preferential treatment of ingroup members rather than direct hostility toward out-group members (as cited in Brewer, 1999). Studies of ethnic and racial prejudice in the United States and Europe confirm that the essence of "subtle racism" is not the presence of strong negative attitudes toward minority out-groups but the absence of positive sentiments toward those groups (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995)

The Social Identity Theory has been criticised on a number of areas; firstly Farr (1996) argues that the Theory suffers from flaws which it points out in other theories such as being reductionist and individualistic (as cited in Hornsey, 2008). It is also argued that the social identity approach focuses on explaining in-group favouritism and gives little explanation to out-group derogation and genuine intergroup hostility (Brown, 1995).

Many researchers have argued that prejudice and discrimination will always be a result of categorisation and therefore an unfortunate by-product of the human need to categorise people (Augoustinos et al, 2006). The very theories which enabled us to explain prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes are also the very theories which provide knowledge into how to moderate and reduce the issues. Duckitt has integrated his knowledge into a multi-level approach to reduce prejudice. Both Authoritarianism and SIT are able to explain, to a point prejudice within groups however, Altemeyer's social learning interpretation is criticised as it cannot account for how levels of authoritarianism fluctuate with social conditions.