

Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture

Prejudice

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(It. *pregiudizio* Fr. *préjudice*; Ger. *Vorurteil*) Middle English term from Old French, from Latin *praejudicium*, from *prae*, in advance, and *judicium*, judgement. Prejudice refers to beliefs, opinions and attitudes that are characterized by inflexibility, dogmatism and narrow-mindedness. These may be learned, copied or acquired beliefs about another group or other groups (or individuals seen as belonging to that group). Such prejudices are usually though not always: (a) acquired before meeting that group/those individuals; (b) negative opinions and judgements; and (c) distorted, misinformed and inaccurate beliefs. Because of this, prejudiced individuals can also be described as intolerant (INTOLERANCE), bigoted and doctrinaire. It is an outlook that is unjustified by facts and unlikely to be changed, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Allport (1954) regarded it as an antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalizations. The core elements of prejudice are well summed up by Goldberg (1993: 104) who states that a prejudice is an antipathic, hostile attitude, felt or expressed towards a person considered strictly as a member of a group. An individual object of the prejudice is presumed to [p. 228 ↓] bear those (usually reprehensible) characteristics supposed to define the group. The prejudicial judgement may be made in inexcusable ignorance of all the available facts, or it may involve the logical error of overgeneralization: persons expressing prejudices may either improperly judge the object of their prejudice a member of the group in question, or they may wrongly infer that an individual is characterized by the designated properties because he/she is a member of the group. Prejudice necessarily involves stereotyping.

Prejudice has both cognitive and affective dimensions, the former including beliefs and stereotypes, the latter active dislike and aversion. Prejudice is an attitude that may or may not map on to its behavioural equivalent: discrimination. For example, where aversion leads to avoidance and bias, the line between attitude and behaviour is crossed and discrimination occurs. But, where dislike remains an attitude or outlook, it remains at the level of prejudice. Allport (1954) identified five levels within an isosceles triangle to depict the ascending scale of prejudice. It begins at the base with anti-locution (verbal abuse and insults), rising to avoidance (actively ignoring specific individuals and groups), discrimination (exclusion and stigmatization (STIGMA)), physical attack (persecution) and ultimately to GENOCIDE (extermination). While Allport's scale seeks to link prejudiced attitudes to discriminatory behaviour, Van der

Berghe (1967) attempts to separate these and to indicate that there is no automatic link. In the 'prejudiced non-discriminator' the existence of prejudice may lead to no outcome, because the individual is either unable or unwilling to act on her/his prejudices. This is contrasted with the 'non-prejudiced discriminator' to indicate that absence of prejudice does not mean absence of discrimination. A non-prejudiced individual may simply conform to prejudicial group or societal norms and this would produce patterns of discrimination. This model is still used in some organizations, though the question of how prejudices may or may not be operationalized needs to be understood in specific contexts. An element of that is the issue of power and there has been a proposition that RACISM can be understood as prejudice plus power. This view maintains that prejudice is widespread and commonplace, but only some have the capacity or power to act upon their prejudices to produce discriminatory outcomes. Although this was influential for a time in the UK, it relies on a simplistic conception of power as a zero sum game. It does not account for unevenness in prejudicial attitudes, or the relationship between beliefs and actions. Nor does it define the basis of power. It is also weak in accounting for ways and times when the objects of prejudice challenge images and representations of themselves.

A number of explanations for prejudicial attitudes have been advanced, including that they are based on: (a) frustration, AGGRESSION, or that they are a means of displacing certain feelings (the frustration-aggression hypothesis); (b) projection and psychic discomfort (a reaction to, or denial of, tension); (c) a general hostility to others and to strangers (FOREIGNER). Some of these traits have been associated with the idea of the authoritarian personality. Adorno et al. (1950) sought to identify the core elements of the personality type they saw as typical of the most uncritical supporters of the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. Among the traits they identified were stereotyped thinking, submissiveness to authority, hostility to those regarded as different (DIVERSITY–SIMILARITY), [p. 229 ↓] and an emphasis on traditional values, correct behaviour and conformist attitudes (CONFORMISM). Adorno et al. held that such views originated in specific types of families and child-rearing practices, particularly families (FAMILY) with a strict father, emotional rigidity and a general lack of love. Using Freudian psychodynamic theory, they argued that the child is forced to develop repression as a defence mechanism against the parenting style that denies the child self-expression. The authoritarian parenting style creates aggression,

frustration and hatred, which is then directed at convenient scapegoats. Inability to deal with ambiguity or cognitive dissonance may lead to the creation of prejudice and stereotypes, especially of ethnic and racial minorities (ETHNIC MINORITY). Conformity and submissiveness make the authoritarian personality susceptible to racist or Fascist ideologies, particularly ANTI-SEMITISM for the period considered by Adorno et al. Their thesis has been extensively criticized, for instance for overstating the influence of parenting and family dynamics. Although devised as a means of explaining racial prejudice, the authoritarian personality theory is now rarely used in research studies.

Allport (1954) also identified faulty childhood training, and fear and frustration as causes of prejudice. But these were only some causes of prejudice. The list of factors includes sexual conflicts, the importance of group membership for individuals, and social structures and cultural patterns. This indicates that prejudices have a broader social context than just the family and childhood experiences. Nonetheless, a criticism of Allport's and other psychological accounts of prejudice would be that they tend to assume that prejudice is an abnormality and that it is confined to relatively small numbers of the population. Because of the notion of prejudgement, they also assume that prejudice is essentially irrational. The existence of prejudice is also often regarded as pathological and as an uncharacteristic aberration of liberal societies. However, studies of racist individuals and groups suggest that abnormality and irrationality are not necessarily useful ways of understanding their motivations and beliefs.

If prejudice is merely irrational this suggests that teaching and inculcation of 'the facts' could eliminate it, and this approach has been adopted in educational and training programmes. But such models do not address the uneven, ambivalent and sometimes contradictory character of prejudices. There are at least three aspects to this. First, prejudices may be maintained even though an individual knows and acknowledges them to be irrational. Secondly, they may be maintained against other groups and cultures even while there is some admiration of the other culture. For example, Jewish people (JEW) may be disliked for seeking to keep apart from the rest of society and admired for their sense of group IDENTITY. Thirdly, prejudiced individuals may dislike some members of a particular group but not others. For these reasons prejudices are not simply antipathy to all 'others', but can have complex and variable meaning and forms.

Prejudices could be seen as having a functional component in serving the needs of individuals, groups and societies by attaching blame or responsibility for social problems to 'out-groups', often racially defined. In this sense, prejudice could be connected to scapegoating, where both are seen as the product of a universal societal requirement for some 'other' to serve the needs of fostering and maintaining integration. There is, however, little evidence to support the idea [p. 230 ↓] that prejudice against out-groups is higher among individuals who are highly bonded into their own groups. The scapegoating or blaming of others for social and personal ills could also be seen as a defensive reaction by particular groups seeking to maintain boundaries at times of rapid social change in which the denunciation and demonization of others fosters a dichotomization of 'us' and 'them'. Some other explanations for prejudice include group position theory, which asserts that prejudice stems from racial ALIENATION, particularly a feeling that one's own group is being treated unfairly. Another view is that hostility increases the more that other groups are seen as competitive threats. This discussion suggests that there is a distinction between a general ETHNOCENTRISM (of 'us' versus 'them') based on prejudices against other societies and cultures, as well as a more specific prejudice against particular groups. These two elements may well overlap in practice but they may also diverge at times.

Prejudice in its racial or ethnic forms suggests that the objects of prejudice are chosen because they are identifiably 'different', for example because of the existence of external markers such as skin colour or some other bodily sign. This does not account for prejudice against those of similar appearance – for example in the case of Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Nor does it explain why some somatic features such as skin colour sometimes acts as markers, while others do not. Both assumed biological and cultural differences may be invoked in prejudices. Prejudicial attitudes and stereotypes may mean that biology and culture are called up in contradictory ways: for example black people may be seen as naturally lazy and, at the same time, as inclined to athleticism. In terms of inter-group relations there may be horizontal hostility and prejudice between similar minority groups (e.g. Orthodox and liberal Jews). In other cases prejudice may be sustained by a negative interdependence where each group perceives the other as a threat to its own identity and existence, as in the Israel/Palestine conflict.

The impact of prejudice is difficult to determine, except in specific instances. It has been suggested that the targets of prejudice may be liable to internalize negative views and this may affect their performance. For example, the low expectations by teachers is held as a common explanation for the poorer educational performance of some black children in schools. A more general version is that the lower socio-economic position of racial minorities is due to the prejudices they encounter in the labour market and other areas of social life.

[K. M.]

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