

Prejudice Is Difficult to Avoid but Can Be Reduced

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Abstract

Prejudice research swept through social psychology and surrounding social sciences in the 1950s like a flood. Because prejudice is a problem that affects everyone, no one is immune to it. When prejudice turns into a severe type of bigotry, it can made acts of violence, murder and even genocide. As a result, there has been increasing debate and research into whether prejudice can be avoided. Through course material, related literature, and theories, this paper examines whether prejudice may be avoided.

The paper will look at the causes of prejudice, external and implicit prejudice, to see if prejudice is inevitable and suggest possible ways to reduce it.

Keywords: prejudice, social norm, social identity theory, realistic conflict theory, implicit

1. Introduction

Prejudice has numerous definitions, and its modern roots may be traced back to Enlightenment liberalism in the 18th century, where Gordon Allport defined prejudice as a feeling of advantage or disadvantage towards someone or something, either before or not dependent on experience (Eagly & Diekmann, 2005).

Many psychologists believe that prejudice is a natural response because the race was considered inferior due to early research on white supremacy in the 1920s. However, after the 1930s and 1940s, this view starts to change due to the increasing focus on anti-Semitism by Nazi ideology. There has been a fundamental shift in the understanding of prejudice, recognising that ‘feelings’ are not necessarily conscious (Banaji et al., 2004; Fazio, Jackson et al., 1995; Williams, 1995).

When prejudice escalates, it often has destructive results on the harmony and coherence of social life. It is therefore of great interest to discuss whether prejudice is inevitable. This discussion aims to analyze whether prejudice is avoidable in terms of three causes of prejudice: the pressure of social normative rules, social identity theory, realistic conflict theory, and implicit prejudice.

The existence of social norms causes people to behave in a normative way that corresponds to their social group or system in order to meet the expectations of the group. Social identity is the nature of an individual’s self-image derived from the social category (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to realistic conflict theory, disputes arising from rivalry for resources, political rights, or social position can lead to bias (Jackson, 1993).

2. The Pressure to Conform to Social Norms

The pressure to conform to social norms can lead to prejudice. This attitude arises because living with stereotypical information and discriminatory behavior can produce prejudice. It is also a manifestation of normative conformity, the tendency to follow the crowd to meet the group’s expectations, which conforms to the norms of its social group or system.

In the 1930s and 1940s, there was a growing concern about anti-Semitism due to Nazi ideology. Authoritarians are “stereotypical thinkers who obey authority, perceive the world in black and white, and enforce tight orders,”

according to “Theodor Adorno”. In an era of widespread racism, profoundly racist behavior and conduct from top to bottom can emerge from the inside out. Social norms of racial discrimination play a significant role in this. Because it is not easy to be a different person under a social norm, people may be under pressure from many sources, such as unappreciative friends and unsupportive family members.

Equally, of course, if social norms are anti-racist, then for the masses, this counteracts the expression of prejudicial intergroup behavior in the public arena (Werner, 2021). Since the late 1950s, for example, changes in the expression of prejudice against minority groups have become increasingly evident under the auspices of egalitarian social norms. New forms of prejudice theory have addressed these changes (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) that is, social norms, whether positive or negative, impact us as a broad social context, and this impact is difficult to avoid.

Although prejudice may seem unavoidable under social norms, we can reduce prejudice if we use such social norms wisely. For example, in racial prejudice, if the dominant norm in society is an egalitarian norm, then the general public’s expression of prejudice and bigotry against minority groups will change (Katz & Hass, 1988).

3. Social Identity Theory

Each of us creates a distinct identity that is unique to ourselves. We do, however, form social identities based on the organizations to which we belong, such as our national, religious, political, and occupational groupings (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010; Tajfel, 1982).

One of the causes of prejudice is said to be social identity theory. The link of prejudice with categorical thinking is one of the reasons behind this. In his landmark 1954 book *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport claims that humans think and categorize using categories. Once established, categories serve as the foundation for typical predictions. It is the foundation of life’s order.

In social identity theory, we classify everything into us: our country and other countries, our group, and their group. Moreover, outcomes include ethnocentric in-group bias, outgroup homogeneity, blaming the victim, justifying rights and superiority. For example, we prefer to think that our group is better, as Marilyn Brewer argues that prejudice “may not be due to hatred of the outgroup, but because positive feelings of appreciation, sympathy, and trust reserve for the in-group.”

So is it possible to avoid prejudice under social identity theory? It is not easy because humans are social creatures, and we will always put ourselves into a particular group. Even when there are good sources of information, the prejudice against outgroups may be reduced, but as long as people are in a society and operate as a particular group, the prejudice will always be there, even if people are not aware that people are prejudiced. (Gawronski & Payne, 2010)

Nevertheless, again, not all biases formed by this theory of social identity are negative; there is a limit to the amount of information we can grasp based on the limits of our cognitive range, and it is also essential from an evolutionary perspective to quickly grasp the key points of a piece of information in a limited amount of time. There are just some ways in which we can still reduce this bias.

4. Realistic Conflict Theory

According to realistic conflict theory, competition for limited resources can result in negative prejudice and discrimination, even when the resources are not essential. For example, in the Robber’s Cave experiment conducted by Muzafer Sherif in 1961, two summer camps developed negative prejudice and animosity after a sporting competition for small prizes. For example, North & Fiske (2012) argue that some young people feel resentment towards older people, most likely because of a sense of injustice that older people are receiving more significant social benefits and opportunities.

So can prejudice be avoided in the face of the reality of conflict theory? Firstly, can we as individuals avoid conflict. In the case of students, we are constantly competing for everything from exam rankings to scholarship qualifications, and according to real-life conflict theory, competition and conflict increase prejudice. Secondly, at the level of larger groups and countries, there are numerous conflicts over scarce resources and social status, such as the war in Iraq. However, even if there is competition, we can adopt a win-win strategy. If a win-win is achieved in competition, as Muzafer Sherif argues, prejudice is reduced when we have a common goal (Sherif et al., 1961). For example, the recent joint agreement between the US, UK, and Australia to share advanced defense technology is a win-win situation for the US, UK, and Australia as an in-group with a common goal. Nevertheless, on the contrary, for other countries, such as France, the pressure of competition is felt as an out-group.

So prejudice due to realistic conflict theory is also not easy to avoid altogether, but it is not absolute. For example, when all humanity as a whole shares the same goal in the face of climate change, prejudice will be significantly reduced.

5. Implicit Prejudice

There are two forms of expression of prejudice, implicit prejudice, and explicit prejudice. As the name suggests, implicit bias is a bias against someone or something that does not manifest itself, even without one being aware of it.

The existence of implicit prejudice makes it more challenging to reduce and avoid prejudice. For example, under the pressure of current social norms, people can conform to the pressure of institutional discrimination (outwardly) without actually believing it themselves (inwardly). As in the case of racial discrimination, the social system advocates against it, so some of the outwardly visible racial behavior decreases but does not disappear, and some people may turn it inward (Lepore & Brown, 1997). So prejudice against this implicit is both difficult to detect and difficult to avoid and eliminate.

Devine (1989) distinguished between stereotypical knowledge and identity (Ashmore & Delboca, 1981). Through a series of experiments, stereotypical knowledge is automatically activated because it has been activated for a more extended period than personal beliefs (Higgins & Wang, 1981). Thus, low-bias individuals respond to stimuli from a stereotyped group without bias only when suppressed automatic bias responses. Even still, this data shows that prejudice is unavoidable, at least on an unconscious level.

As a result, prejudice appears to be unavoidable as a result of regular cognitive processes. “As long as individuals continue to think, they will be prejudiced,” Billg (1985) concludes.

6. Conclusion

In summary, this essay argues that prejudice seems to be unavoidable because it is influenced by many factors, such as the pressure of social norms, social identity, and theories of actual conflict. With the influence of the political economy of each country and the progress of the times, some prominent acts of outward prejudice have been gradually reduced, but implicit prejudice still exists. Although prejudice is challenging to eliminate and avoid, there are still ways we can reduce it, such as social support and shared group goals. We are all part of the planet, and every person and race are equal, so hopefully, we will all be able to recognize prejudice and deal with it rationally.

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