



An Overview on Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination

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Abstract: Specifically, the paper defines and distinguishes the key concepts of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination, highlighting how bias can occur at individual, institutional, and cultural levels. We also review different theoretical perspectives on these phenomena, including individual differences, social cognition, functional relations between groups, and identity concerns. We offer a broad overview of the field, charting how this area has developed over previous decades and identify emerging trends and future directions. It explains the organization of the book and presents a brief synopsis of the chapters in the volume.

ISSN 2454-308X



KEY CONCEPTS: The current volume focuses on three forms of social bias toward a group and its members: (a) prejudice, an attitude reflecting an overall evaluation of a group; (b) stereotypes, associations, and attributions of specific characteristics to a group; and (c) discrimination, biased behavior toward, and treatment of, a group or its members. Conceptualizations of each of these aspects of bias have evolved over time. For example, recent research distinguishing between implicit and explicit cognition has greatly affected how theorists define prejudice and stereotypes. Likewise, concepts of discrimination have gone from a tight focus on individuals engaging in biased treatment to how institutional policies and cultural processes perpetuate disparities between groups. We briefly review the development of each of these central concepts below.

Introduction: Stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination are all forms of bias that are responsible for the simplest and even ‘harmless’ societal acts of favoring a neighbor of one’s own race, class, creed or sex by inviting them over for dinner over another neighbor of a different race, class, creed or sex, to the most egregious crimes that humanity has ever witnessed like the holocaust that occurred during the Second World War.

As will be shown in this paper, there are various theories that explain these discriminative acts. The theories include social justification theory, ethnocentrism, social dominance theory, and system justification theory.

This paper will discuss these three concepts separately and their various sub-forms, and will conclude with a proposition concept that will offer a means of overcoming the aforementioned forms of biasness – stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination.

Stereotyping: Stereotyping or a stereotype is an assumption or a conclusion reached by an individual concerning another individual or individuals or group of persons without the benefit of properly acquainting oneself with wholesome knowledge about the particular individual(s) or group of persons. Stereotyping arises out of an individual’s strong attachment to his or her in-group – the social group, for example family, or close friends towards whom an individual feels the highest attachment. An individual’s in-group makes the person feel secure and satisfies the individual’s need for belonging. An out-group on the other hand is a social group towards which an individual feels a sense of dislike and the individual views the group with contempt. Therefore, stereotypes serve to reinforce an individual’s unqualified opinion of another individual or group. Another concept that is significant in the understanding of stereotypes is the concept of illusionary correlation. This is the instance of an individual seeing a certain relationship between sets of information or groups even where none is present. A person



may for example associate a group of people, for example, Latinos with certain characteristics like laziness even when these characteristics are non-existent.

Prejudice: A prejudice is a conclusion about someone or something reached without having sufficient information. There are various forms of prejudice that exist, each distinct in its application of assumptions. The first type of prejudice is ambivalent prejudice. This type of prejudice is manifested in an individual who genuinely believes in qualities like equality for all and other such egalitarian beliefs, but still holds the opinion that different social and ethnic groups will inevitably have both positive and negative characteristics. Such an individual will therefore vouch for policies like social welfare while still believing that members of minority groups are inherently lazy. Individuals with ambivalent prejudice tend to have a reactionary mechanism called response amplification – the individual will react more intensely than the average person to situations involving members of an out-group who act in a manner inconsistent with the individual's prejudiced opinions. For example, if a white person who believes in equality for all is coned by a black person, he or she may react more intensely to this act than the average person. The second type of prejudice is envious prejudice. This type of prejudice involves the disparaging and denigration of certain social groups but only because the particular individual is inherently envious of the particular social group. There is an element of admiration of the particular out-group by the individual. For instance a person may feel admiration along with envy for Jews who are known for their entrepreneurial expertise. A person may also feel envy coupled with admiration for working class women who are able to balance family and career demands. The third type of prejudice is contemptuous prejudice; this type of prejudice consists of primarily negative views towards a particular social group by an individual. This may involve, for instance, a person who dislikes door-to-door salespersons or an individual who is deeply resentful of members of a different race or religion. Sexual prejudice involves all manifest forms of discrimination towards members of an out-group based purely on their sexual orientation.

Discrimination: Discrimination has often been used simultaneously with racism in certain discussions. Discrimination is the selective negative treatment of an individual based on the individual's race, religion, creed or class. There are various forms of discrimination based on race, the first one being aversive racism. This form of racism is as interesting as it is subtle. Various studies indicate that many public individuals who denounce racism in public before the masses tend to practice it in its most subtle forms unconsciously. Various studies also indicate that people labeling themselves as liberals are not necessarily more likely to perform less acts of subtle racism as compared to conservatives.

Explicit and implicit bias: Whereas discrimination can occur toward a specific member of a group or the group as a whole, stereotypes and prejudice are intrapsychic phenomena. That is, they occur within an individual and may vary not only in their transparency to others but also in the level of awareness of the person who harbors stereotypes and prejudice. Traditionally, stereotypes and prejudice have been conceived as explicit responses – beliefs and attitudes people know they hold, subject to deliberate (often strategic) control in their expression (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, et al., 1995). In contrast to these explicit, conscious, and deliberative processes, implicit prejudices and stereotypes involve a lack of awareness and unintentional activation. The mere presence of the attitude object may activate the associated stereotype and attitude automatically and without the perceiver noticing. Although implicit attitudes and stereotype measures are now commonly used (Fazio & Olson, 2003), researchers continue to debate their psychological meaning. Some contend that implicit measures of bias primarily represent overlearned and 'habitual' cultural associations rather than attitudes (Karpinski & Hilton, 2001). Others argue that implicit



and explicit measures assess a single attitude measured at different points in the process of expression, with social desirability concerns more strongly shaping overt expressions (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, et al., 1995). And still others consider implicit and explicit measures to reflect different components of a system of dual attitudes, with implicit responses often representing ‘older’ attitudes and stereotypes that have been ‘overwritten’ by newer, explicit forms of bias or incompletely replaced by individuals who strive for egalitarian beliefs (Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000), or reflecting different aspects of attitudes, such as affective and cognitive components (Rudman, 2004). Nevertheless, there is consensus that implicit manifestations of attitudes and stereotypes exist and reliably predict some behaviors, often independently from explicit attitudes and stereotypes. We purposefully avoided reference to intentionality or personal endorsement in our working definitions of prejudice and stereotypes to accommodate implicit biases.

Institutional and cultural discrimination: Although psychologists have historically focused on the individual-level processes in intergroup relations, newer research informed by approaches from sociology, Black psychology, and cultural psychology illuminate how, independent of individual efforts or orientation, institutional and cultural forces maintain and promote intergroup bias and disparities. Institutional discrimination, which may originally stem from individuals’ prejudices and stereotypes, refers to the existence of institutional policies (e.g., poll taxes, immigration policies) that unfairly restrict the opportunities of particular groups of people. These laws and policies foster ideologies that justify current practices. Historically, for example, White Americans developed racial ideologies to justify laws that enabled two forms of economic exploitation: slavery of Black people and the seizure of lands from native peoples. Similarly, until relatively recently, immigration policies in many parts of the world favored White immigrants over immigrants of racial minorities.

BASIC PROCESSES IN PREJUDICE, STEREOTYPING, AND DISCRIMINATION: Summarizing the extensive research on social biases with a limited number of themes, Haslam and Dovidio (2010) identified basic factors that foster and maintain bias:

- personality and individual differences,
- group conflict,
- social categorization, and
- Social identity. We review each below.

Conclusion: A final future direction we would like to see unfold is a greater input from social psychological research on prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination to relevant policy. The findings reviewed in the paper in this volume have important and multiple implications for government policy, ranging from increasing the educational aspirations of minority youth, to providing equal access to health care irrespective of ethnic group, to promoting effective interventions to improve social harmony. A case in point is the burning question of whether residential diversity is associated with reduced levels of trust.

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