

Prejudice Reduction, Approaches to

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The body of research on prejudice is one of the largest in psychology. Research on prejudice has flourished from the very start of the discipline, which has resulted in a wide range of theories, measurement tools, and approaches to the reduction of prejudice. Across these many different studies, prejudice is commonly understood to mean a negative bias toward a social category of people, with cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral components.

Theories of prejudice and prejudice reduction typically approach prejudice from a social or an individual perspective. Various theories also place different emphases on cognitive, affective, and motivational determinants of prejudice and prejudiced behavior. These differing theoretical approaches recommend different strategies for reducing individual, group, or environmental prejudice (i.e., prejudice in a workplace or school).

Theories that approach prejudice as a social phenomenon identify interpersonal relationships and communication as the locus of change. One of the oldest and most cherished theories of prejudice reduction, the contact hypothesis, predicts that prejudice is diminished when members of two different groups interact with one another under conditions of equal status, shared goals, authority sanction, and the absence of competition (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). (See CONTACT THEORY, INTERGROUP.) A prejudice reduction intervention based on the contact hypothesis would, for example, bring Arab and Israeli children to the same summer camp, where they would live together in

the same kinds of cabins and work on collaborative projects, supervised by adults who support cross-group friendships. An update on this hypothesis is the extended contact approach, which predicts that prejudice is reduced through vicarious contact with outgroup members as well. Extended contact occurs when an individual's friends describe other friendships with outgroup members or when individuals view media portrayals of ingroup members interacting positively with outgroup individuals. Compared to face-to-face contact, extended contact is easier to engineer; another added value of the extended contact strategy is the idea that extended contact will provoke less anxiety than face-to-face intergroup contact. (See CONTACT THEORY: EXTENDED AND PARASOCIAL.)

Another social understanding of prejudice and prejudice reduction comes from social norms theory, which states that prejudice is fostered by a perception of the ingroup's negative attitude toward another group (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Individuals are highly influenced by the perceived consensus of their social group – that is, the group norm. Prejudiced group norms can encourage prejudiced behavior, and tolerant norms can discourage prejudiced behavior. Individuals usually perceive group norms through interaction with group members, but these perceptions may also be influenced by countervailing sources of information, such as media programs, dissident group members, or public opinion data. Thus, the social norms approach to understanding prejudice recommends targeting individuals' perceptions of the group consensus to create the perception (and then, the reality) of a more tolerant norm. (See NORMATIVE INFLUENCE, THEORIES OF.)

Other theories understand and suggest ways to alter prejudice on an individual level. Social identity and social categorization theories focus on how individuals perceive the social world according to group membership. These theories maintain that conflict stems from the greater value individuals place on their own group compared to outgroups, and offer four types of solutions for breaking down the perceived boundaries between groups (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). The decategorization approach emphasizes individual identity over group identity; the recategorization approach emphasizes a superordinate identity as encompassing and superseding the separate identities; the crossed-categorization approach emphasizes a third shared identity over the two separate identities; finally, the integrative or common identity approach emphasizes a common shared identity without disregarding the smaller separate identities. (See COMMON INGROUP IDENTITY MODEL.)

Cognition, or individual thought, is the primary basis of prejudice according to social identity theory and a number of other theories. Other cognitive understandings of prejudice, which posit that prejudice grows from ignorance or unfamiliarity, have birthed a variety of interventions to teach individuals about another group's background, language, or cultural traditions, or to teach statistical inference in the interest of avoiding statistically faulty stereotypes. Delving into unconscious thought, recent theory postulates that stereotypes can be overlearned and can operate regardless of individual volition. Following demonstrations that unconscious preferences for certain social groups over others (measured through subliminal priming and reaction time techniques) can be associated with nonverbal expressions of unfriendliness, a number of "(un)consciousness-raising" strategies were designed to combat unconscious bias, using thought suppression, awareness,

reconditioning, and control (Blair, 2002). For example, individuals are taught to reflect upon cues that led them to unintentionally biased judgments or reactions, cues like the sight of a Black person in a store, which triggered an assumption that the person was an employee rather than a fellow shopper. Other interventions include requiring individuals who hire or evaluate others to specify concrete dimensions of assessment before viewing the candidates, to prevent unconscious bias from affecting their decision.

Models of prejudice that focus on emotion and motivation contend that emotional and motivational states have surprising and influential effects on the expressions of prejudice (Smith, 1993). One approach to prejudice reduction growing out of these theories proposes that experiencing the emotions or thoughts of an outgroup member using a perspective-taking exercise can decrease stereotyping and increase the perceived overlap between the self and the other. For example, perspective-taking exercises aimed at decreasing stereotypes about the elderly involve writing an essay from the perspective of an elderly person. Motivational theories assert that individual goals like maintaining consistency and protecting one's self-worth can move people to repress prejudice or engage in reconciliation. A cognitive dissonance approach along these lines encourages participants to see prejudice as inconsistent with some valued attitude or trait. Self-affirmation theory predicts that people will resist derogating others when their own self-worth is affirmed, and recommends positive feedback as one way to derail prejudice.

What works to reduce real-world antagonisms and conflict? All of the foregoing theories were tested in the psychological laboratory, but few have been tested in real-world prejudice reduction interventions. Unfortunately, a survey of the evidence gathered from real-world interventions indicates that accumulated knowledge is thin,

and much more theoretically driven intervention research is required. On the one hand, most psychological theory has not been tested in the context of interventions; on the other, most real-world interventions to reduce prejudice are not based on psychological theory. Some of the theories with the strongest support from laboratory research have received scant attention in the field. Few programs originating in nonprofit or educational organizations, government agencies, and consulting firms have been evaluated rigorously. Entire genres of prejudice-reduction interventions, including moral education, organizational diversity training, anti-bias public service announcements, and cultural competence training have never been evaluated with experimentally sound methods.

This lack of attention to the combined goals of theory and intervention grows more alarming in light of statistics showing the reach of unevaluated prejudice reduction interventions. For example, spending on corporate diversity training in the United States alone reaches an estimated \$8 billion annually, while the impact of diversity training remains largely unknown (Paluck, 2006). Moreover, despite research showing that medical practitioners' bias against ethnic minorities or the elderly can affect their administration of care, and reports of sharply increased demand within the law enforcement field following September 2001, sensitivity trainings administered to medical personnel and police are rarely based on theory or subjected to rigorous evaluation.

The small but growing area of field experiments testing theoretically based prejudice reduction interventions informs our knowledge of which theories should guide real-world prejudice reduction efforts. The majority of evidence accumulated thus far points toward models based on the social and interpersonal nature rather than the individual nature of prejudice. Cooperative

learning, a group-based educational technique, claims the largest share of rigorous field evidence. Derived from the general theory of social interdependence and best known through Eliot Aronson's "Jigsaw classroom" technique, cooperative learning lessons are engineered so that students must teach and learn from one another. Teachers in Jigsaw classrooms give each student one piece of the lesson plan, so that good lesson comprehension requires students to put together the pieces of the "puzzle" collectively. Cooperative learning in mixed-race groups appears to be modestly successful at building cross-race friendships and helping. (See CONSTRUCTIVE CONTROVERSY; COOPERATIVE LEARNING; SOCIAL INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY.)

In addition, the predictions of the extended contact hypothesis and of the social norms theory of prejudice have been borne out in field experimental studies of antiprejudice media and reading interventions. Some of these interventions have included soap operas in post-genocide Rwanda, in which typical but appealing characters portray positive intergroup cooperation and interaction, and storybooks read to White schoolchildren in the United Kingdom, which portrayed disabled or non-White children befriending White nondisabled children. Thus far, the evidence suggests that extended contact can increase intergroup liking, and that narratives can communicate norms and inspire empathy and cooperative behavior. Peer dialogue and peer influence interventions also show promise through some field studies driven by theories of extended contact and social norms.

More field experimentation is merited in the examination of individually based prejudice reduction strategies, such as those involving social identity theory and the construal of group categories, as well as strategies based on theories of prejudice that emphasize emotion, motivation, and

unconscious bias. Based on the success of affirmation interventions in the scholastic achievement domain, interventions to reduce prejudice that utilize self-affirmation theory seem promising. Rigorous tests of interventions aimed at affecting unconscious bias will prove important for understanding prejudice reduction as well as the role of unconscious bias in guiding real-world behavior. The contact hypothesis, which benefited from early and innovative field and laboratory studies, remains relatively untested in the real-world due to the limited number of randomized studies conducted in field settings and the narrow range of prejudices tested in those studies.

In conclusion, within the psychological research tradition theoretical approaches to prejudice reduction have flowered. Looking ahead, methodological contributions to the study of prejudice reduction should prove to be just as important as theoretical contributions. Laboratory research has played an important role in the process of developing and testing ideas, but too often this process stops short of real-world tests. This methodological habit has led to a dearth of theoretical ideas that are ready for pragmatic implementation. Advances in the study of prejudice reduction can be achieved with research programs modeled after early prejudice researchers like Stuart Cook and Kurt Lewin. Such research programs would generate hypotheses through field observation and prejudice reduction testing with parallel laboratory and field experiments. The imperative to test ideas in the field will keep theories appropriately complex and attuned to real-world conditions, and continually revisiting the laboratory will help to refine understandings of the causal mechanisms at work, which in turn can inspire new interventions for prejudice reduction.

SEE ALSO: Common Ingroup Identity Model; Constructive Controversy; Contact Theory: Extended and Parasocial; Contact Theory, Intergroup; Cooperative Learning; Normative Influence, Theories of; Social Interdependence Theory.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- <http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/crow/topicconflict.htm>
- <http://www.socialpsychology.org/peace.htm>
- <http://www.understandingprejudice.org/>