

CONCEPT OF PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION :

Dr. Dhananjay Kumar Singh

(Assistant Professor)

Department of Psychology, Jagdam College, Chapra, Saran, Bihar.

''Prejudice'' is a constellation of attitudes that cause support or justify discrimination. It is a form of prejudgment in which anyone who is identified with a group against which there are unfavourable social attitudes is looked upon with disfavor and distrust and is regarded as inferior. According to Baron and Byrne (1993), ''Prejudice is an attitude (usually negative) toward the members of some group, based solely on their membership in that group''. It is not based on what kind of person he is or what he does or says, but on his identification with a group. He is thus judged in terms of already-existing attitudes or prejudged in terms of already-existing attitudes or prejudged in the sense that a judgement of him is made before he is assessed as an individual (Ames and Sakuma, 1969; Gallagher, 1958; Gardner, 1968; Triandis and Vassilion, 1967).

In the constellation of attitudes that constitute prejudice, three elements stand out. First, there are widely accepted beliefs concerning the people against whom prejudice is directed These beliefs are rarely based on personal experience but on stereotypes concerning the appearance, the behavior, and the personal qualities of all people who belong to a specific group Like most stereotypes, these are passed down from one generation to another in a cultural group and are learned by each successive generation as part of the social learning.

Second, the stereotyped beliefs are accompanied by emotions, This emotional accompaniment ranges from cold indifference or distaste to bitter and violent hostility in many instances, prejudice is a form of displaced hostility or of repressed aggression directed against a scapegoat group in order to resolve or avoid one's own grievances.

The third element in the constellation of attitudes that constitute prejudice is the belief that one should treat those against whom there is prejudice in some particular way. The kind of treatment that is endorsed varies from person to person and ranges from indifference to avoidance, from the exclusion of the members of a group against whom there is prejudice from some or all of the large group's activities to active persecution (Allport, 1964; Cooper, 1959).

It is important to recognize the difference between prejudice and preference A person may prefer being with people who have interests and values in common with his and with whom he feels ''at home'' to being with people whose interests and values are different from his. This does not mean that he dislikes those who are different or feels superior to them it merely means that, given a choice, he will associate with people whom he finds congenial.

Unlike prejudice preference contains no hostility. The social gap resulting from preference is due to a ''comfort differential'' or a feeling of greater ''at homeness'' with a particular group. Thus while preference leads to social isolation for those who are different. the quality of the isolation is quite distant from that which comes from prejudice because it contains no attitudes of hostility and no feeling of superiority.

While both prejudice and preference cause a person to discriminate against others in the sense that he rejects their companionship, there is a vast difference in the behavior found in the two situations. In the case of

preference, the person selects from those who are available for him to associate with the people he finds most congenial and he then ignores the others. However, he does not attempt to make them feel uncomfortable or unwanted by being rude and discourteous or by hurting their feelings or showing his superiority. Usually he is kind and courteous, although he may indirectly let them know that he does not want their companionship by showing an interest in others while in their presence,

Prejudice, like all attitudes that develop early in life, may become so habitual that people are not aware of being prejudiced until a situation arises that tests their objectivity, such as the entry into a neighbourhood of members of a different racial or religious group.

Nor is prejudice always apparent in the behavior of those who are prejudiced. It comes to the fore primarily in times of inconvenience, or disturbance of the normal pattern of life. Prejudice against older workers, for example, is far less obvious during economic prosperity when there are plenty of jobs available, than during recessions when there is unemployment and the elderly are discriminated against in favour of younger workers.

''Discrimination'' involves acting categorically rather than individually. Although in popular usage the term includes such things as failure to include in group activities those with whom the person feels little in common. Specifically, this means that when a person discriminates against others it is because he looks upon them as belonging to a group against which he is prejudiced; he feels justified in treating them in a manner which he considers appropriate for all members of the group to which they belong.

Discrimination following prejudice differs from discrimination following preference in two major ways. Discrimination following prejudice consists, first of treating a person on some basis other than individual merit and, second, of treating the person in such a manner that one's hostility is expressed in behavior that does physical or psychological harm to the person. Instead of ignoring a person he does not find congenial, the prejudiced person often goes out of his way to try to cause harm. The prejudiced person usually rationalizes his negative feeling and the unsocial behavior engendered by his prejudices. Otherwise he would suffer feelings of guilt and remorse over his unfounded attitudes and unsportsmanlike behavior (Allport, 1964; Arter, 1959; Cooper, 1959).

Since discrimination is based on attitudes which constitute the roots of prejudice, it is logical that discrimination would develop later than prejudice. Studies of the origins of prejudice and discrimination reveal that while awareness of differences between people of different races and of the two sexes is apparent in children's behavior by the time they are 4 years old, awareness per se does not constitute prejudice (Kutner, 1958; Lambert and Tranquelli, 1956; Morland, 1966; Stevenson and Stevenson, 1960;). Only when the child learns the social attitudes toward those he perceives as different will prejudice develop. Prejudiced behavior or discrimination occurs slightly later (Allport, 1964; Arter, 1959; Morland, 1966; Stevenson and Stevenson, 1960;) By the time children enter first grade in school, the seeds of prejudice, shown earlier, are already taking root (Colle, 1968; Taylor, 1966;) As Giles (1959) has stressed, ''little children, on first coming to school have the words and sometimes the feeling of prejudice''.

The victim of prejudice and discrimination is always psychologically damaged. Allport (1964) has emphasized the damage to the child :

'' A child who finds himself rejected and attacked on all sides is not likely to develop dignity and poise as his outstanding traits. On the contrary, he develops (ego) defenses. Like a dwarf in a world of menacing giants, he cannot fight on equal terms. He is forced to listen to their derision and laughter and submit to their abuse''.

Because adolescence is an especially insecure and sensitive age, prejudice and discrimination at this time can produce even more psychological damage than in childhood, Why this is so has been explained by Friedenurg. (1959).

”Adolescents lack reserves of self-esteem to sustain them under humiliating conditions..... Adolescents are dreadfully concerned about society’s appraisal of them and or their worth... They cannot easily assimilate an attack on their dignity or worth, for it produces not merely resentment but intense anxiety. The self is threatened while still ill- defined and in its early stages of construction.”

Psychological damage from prejudice and discrimination takes many different forms. The target person learns to hate himself and his group because he feels that others hate him and the group with which he is identified. This leads to hostile and bitter attitudes toward those who have perpetrated the discrimination and toward all members of the group with which they are identified. In time, he may come to believe that the whole social environment is hostile.

As a result of feeling that he is hated the target person often develops aggressive behavior patterns. Frequently his hostility is expressed in antisocial behavior characteristic of the juvenile delinquent or the adult criminal. One who cannot reconcile himself to being neglected or rejected because of his identification with an outgroup may try to gain status by affiliating himself with a group that wants to retaliate against those who make him and his group feel ashamed, inferior, resentful and hostile. That leads to juvenile delinquency or adult criminality.

To compensate for feelings of inadequacy, the target of prejudice and discrimination may establish higher levels of aspiration than his age-mates who are not subjected to such treatment. More often, however realizing the general helplessness of his position, he becomes lethargic and submissive. In time, He becomes indifferent to success and does not strive to work up to capacity.

A person who has been subjected to prejudice may try to meet his frustrations by being conventional and authoritarian or by being derogatory toward those who have discriminated against him. He may develop strong respect for authority, power, and ”toughness”, thus intensifying his feelings of inadequacy and reinforcing his willingness to submit to authority, even though resentfully.

To defend his ego, the person may do a number of things, The most common ego defenses are an obsessive concern about one’s minority-group status, withdrawal, passivity, protective clowning, a strengthening of ingroup ties, and a hatred of self and of one’s group. None of these lead to good personal or social adjustments and, as a result, they cause further damage to the personality-damage that may be so severe that mental disorders develop.

Prejudice and discrimination affect people differently. A person who feels insecure and rejected at home will react with greater emotional intensity to discrimination outside the home than a person who feels that his home is a place where he can retreat from prejudice a person who has gained some social acceptance is less damaged by derogatory labels than one who found little or no acceptance among his age-mates.

People subjected to authoritarian child-training methods sometimes react aggressively to prejudice and sometimes submissively. As a general rule, those from the lower social classes react aggressively and those from the middle and upper classes, submissively Girls as a group smart more severely under what they regard as rude and humiliating treatment from the majority group than boys. But they have been trained to be less aggressive than boys, and so are frustrated in their desire to retaliate.

Those who are segregated from their peers, owing to prejudice against them, regardless of source, are more damaged psychologically than are those who are not segregated. In speaking of the effects of racial segregation, Williams and Byars (1968) have emphasized.

'' if society communicates to the Negro child that he is a second-rate, subservient individual, it is probable that he would come to view himself as an inferior person. There is no social institution that emphatically communicates to the Negro that he is an inferior individual more that segregation does.''

There are individual differences in the way people react to prejudice. Some withdraw from the social group, some develop aggressive defense reactions, and some turn their hostility against society in general and engage in antisocial acts. Few accept discrimination as a challenge to show others their true worth.

The person who is prejudiced and shows it by discriminating against other is likewise damaged psychologically, but in different way from the person who is discriminated against. In general, the effect is to increase the intensity of the personality traits that predisposed him to be prejudiced.

By inflating his ego at the expense of these, by being intentionally rude to those whom he regards as inferior, he gets a false sense of his importance in the group and develops a superiority complex. Prejudice makes a person rigid, intolerant, cruel, vindictive, and extremely egocentric. Such a person shuns responsibilities whenever possible so that he will not be blamed if things go wrong; he accepts the conventional mores of the social group and dislikes all who deviate from them; and he is willing to conform to group opinion that he does not agree with in the hope of improving his status in the group.

Even when a person recognizes that prejudice conflicts with good sportsmanship or his religious training, he often clings to his old emotion-laden beliefs. This is partly because prejudice fills an underlying personal need and partly because it is the ''things to do'' As Allport (1964) states, prejudice may be a ''psychological crutch'' used by immature and ''psychologically crippled'' people or it may come from a desire to conform to group expectations.

If a conflict develops between a person's moral and religious values, on the one hand, and his desire to inflate his ego and conform to group expectations on the other, he is likely to rationalize his prejudices and try to justify his attitude and behavior by claiming that 'every one does it or that the minority groups people he has known are ''typical'' of the group with which they are identified.

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