

The Psychology of Prejudice

Several of the research findings in the area of prejudice are reviewed by this author.

PROBABLY no other area in the social sciences has been accorded the exhaustive attention given to the psychology of prejudice. Illustrations come easily. In 1944 we had the authoritative *An American Dilemma* (1), which focused on prejudice toward Negroes as a sociological rather than a psychological phenomenon; nonetheless, at the heart of the book was its poignant description of the discrepancy between the officially sanctioned "American Creed," with its emphasis on equal rights for all, and the actual attitudes and behavior of people, a discrepancy which has both intrapersonal and interpersonal implications.

In 1950 *The Authoritarian Personality* (2) was published, and, in its wake, we have had a plethora of studies utilizing the ubiquitous F (Fascism) scale. This measure, which purports to measure ethnic prejudice indirectly, has been roundly criticized on both methodological and theoretical grounds, but its widespread use continues. Any summation of the evidence for or against the validity of the scale would be irrelevant. My point is simply that the large amount of research on and with the F scale necessarily implies a continuing interest on the part of social scientists, in general, and psychologists, in particular, with the area of prejudice. We have, in

addition, the incontrovertible fact that just a few years ago the research findings of social scientists were invoked by our highest tribunal in its historic decision against school segregation.

Now, all of this is by way of saying that social scientists have a vested interest in the problem of prejudice. It is certainly no secret that, for better or for worse, the political convictions of social scientists range from what is usually termed "liberal" to what would be called, in contemporary American culture at least, "left-wing." The injection of values into social science inquiries and the possibly distorting effects of value premises on the collection and the interpretation of data represent complex problems very far short of resolution, but, in any case, it can be asserted that, almost without exception, those social scientists who study prejudice are against it. It is this sort of commitment which makes us eager to have our research findings not only publicized, but adapted to such stuff of everyday life as, to coin an example, potential tensions in a newly integrated school. Definitive answers are few, of course, but enough evidence has been accumulated to permit tentative statements while research continues.

Theories of Prejudice

Before citing specific research, some necessarily brief mention should be made of the state of theory in the field. Actua-

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ally, no one theory seems to fit all of the data. With regard to anti-Semitism, for example, some authors stress the projection of superego demands (3). That is, the anti-Semite personifies the Jew as grasping, deceitful and overambitious because of his need to deny these worldly traits in himself. (In this psychoanalytic approach anti-Negro attitudes would result from the projection of id impulses so that Negroes would be perceived as lazy, uncontrollably aggressive and sexually promiscuous.) Rose (4) theorizes that many of us hate the materialism, striving and mendacity which appear to have accompanied urbanization and the Jew has become the symbol of urban life. Many writers have given Marxist or quasi-Marxist explanations which view anti-Semitism as a diversion created by economic royalists to draw attention away from their depredations. Still others stress the ready-made role of the Jew as a scapegoat dating back to the Diaspora. *The Authoritarian Personality* authors would view anti-Semitism as part of a general syndrome of hostility toward less privileged groups which has its origins in the insecurity engendered by certain kinds of child-rearing practices. This list is by no means all-inclusive, but it does provide some notion of the diversity of approaches to the problem at the present time. It would appear wise to agree with Allport (5) that, inasmuch as prejudice is a problem of many aspects, all theories which focus on one aspect have their utility, but must be regarded as only partially valid.

Some Research Findings

One of the most significant research findings in this field and probably one of particular interest to the teaching profession is that efforts to change prej-

udiced attitudes through such techniques as the communication of information and emotional appeal are relatively unavailing. This statement requires some clarification because many studies (6) have also indicated that individuals possessing considerable information about a group are more favorably disposed toward that group than individuals with little information. (Possibly, this is one of the reasons, too, why degree of formal education correlates negatively with prejudiced attitudes toward minority groups.) In any event the inefficiency of such methods as persuasion and didactic information-giving necessitates a distinction between the cognitive and affective components of an attitude. From their study of the effects of integrated interracial housing on attitudes toward Negroes, Deutsch and Collins (7) conclude that social interaction of a rather intimate sort is more necessary for a change in feelings than a change in beliefs. The general conclusion from studies of this sort has been that if affective components of an attitude are changed, the cognitive components of the attitude will also change. Thus, if a person through social exposure to Negroes comes to like them better, his beliefs about them will almost inevitably change in a more favorable direction. On the other hand it is quite possible to change the cognitive structure of an attitude—through, say, an informative lecture on the oversimplification and distortion inherent in any stereotype—but feelings toward the object of the attitude may remain essentially unchanged.

Obviously, I am attempting to make the point that increased interaction is indispensable to the diminution of prejudice, but it would be both Pollyannaish and erroneous to maintain that such interaction is sufficient as well as necessary.

Thus, in a study by Mussen (8), it was found that, after a four-week stay in an interracial summer camp, there was no reliable change in the attitudes of the white boys as a group toward Negroes. Roughly a quarter of the boys showed a decrease in prejudice, but roughly the same number increased in prejudice. What is significant about this study, however, is the personality differences that were observed in these two groups—those who increased and those who decreased in prejudice. Those who manifested a decrease had fewer aggressive needs, were more accepting of their parents and, in general, did not perceive their environment to be as threatening.

The Mussen study raises an important and vexing theoretical problem. If, in some cases at least, ethnic hostility is predicated on the degree of personal aggression, how is the aggression to be eliminated? One argument is that the aggression cannot be eliminated, but socially desirable (or sublimated) means should be found to channelize it. To make the point clearer, the current spate of jokes, variously designated as "sick" jokes, "Bloody Mary" jokes, or "Ivy League" jokes, may be illustrative. One explanation given for the present popularity of these jokes is that people, in the last few years, have been asked to carry an inordinate number of benevolent intentions. Ethnic prejudice, for example, is much more tabooed than it used to be. The aggression of people has to be released in some manner and one form of expression is this extremely hostile, albeit socially innocuous, humor. It should be noted that such an explanation is essentially Freudian in the sense that it assumes a quantum of aggression which strives for expression. Whether such an assumption is tenable is still a controversial matter. I raise the problem be-

cause the acceptance or rejection of the assumption could conceivably lead to differences in the kind of action one would advocate to combat prejudice. If one rejects the assumption, the problem is less complicated; if one accepts it, there is the additional problem of how to cope with the aggression that would be stifled by the elimination or marked decrease of ethnic prejudice.

In reference to the statement made above that the expression of ethnic prejudice is becoming more tabooed, empirical evidence exists to support the contention, at least in the kind of socio-economic distribution that is represented by college students. One of the early studies in the content of ethnic stereotypes was done at Princeton by Katz and Braly (9). These investigators asked undergraduates to select five from a list of 84 attributes that they thought were most characteristic of various ethnic groups. Gilbert (10) repeated the procedure in 1950, again with Princeton undergraduates. The general result can be summarized by what Gilbert calls the "fading effect." To be sure, stereotypes were expressed, but they were much weaker than in the 1932 study. Not only were stereotypes of ethnic outgroups less frequent and consistent, but Americans as a group were glorified much less. Moreover, many subjects in the 1950 study were hostile to the study itself because the instructions asked them to make generalizations about groups of people. The result clearly indicates (keeping in mind the restricted nature of the population) a weakening in the expression of both hostile and non-hostile stereotypes toward outgroups. Whether the 1950 subjects would be more accepting than their predecessors of people from these outgroups in actual social situations is an open question. As stated before, the be-

liefs or cognitive aspects of their attitudes may have changed without any alteration in feelings toward these groups.

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Social Acceptance of Navajo Students

Reported here is a study which found that there is a positive relationship between an improving classroom climate for social acceptance of a minority group and teacher attitudes that are not rigidly authoritarian.

AT ONE TIME it was assumed that the American Indian was a vanishing race, but the Indian and his problems refused to disappear. Nearly everyone had misjudged the vitality and tenacity of his culture and subsequent events have demonstrated that he is here to stay for some time yet.

In the beginning, faced with the difficult problem of providing educational facilities where Indians lived and work-

ing under the assumption that the Indian culture must certainly soon be absorbed by the dominant, white culture, both federal and private educational programs for Indians frequently set up off-reservation boarding schools as answers to the "Indian Problem." Often established at great distances from the students' homes to discourage running away, these institutions were typically administered under military-type discipline with a

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