

The Social Psychology of Racial Prejudice and Discrimination

I think it's useful to try and estimate how much prejudice there is around. We can't arrive at any totally accurate figures, because a lot depends on your definition of prejudice, but the table below gives the best estimate I know how to construct on the basis of all the evidence to date. I don't know of any investigation which contradicts it.

Estimated Distribution of Types of Prejudice	per cent
1. <i>Pathological prejudice - maybe should be confined or treated</i>	2
2. <i>Authoritarian personality or similar permanent psychological state of hostility or strong and outspoken prejudice - Alf Garnett or Archie Bunker.</i>	8
3. <i>Undergoing relative deprivation or other unhappy circumstances which can be relieved most readily by prejudiced expression or actual discrimination.</i>	20
4. <i>Conformists, who will be mainly influenced by circumstances. Attitudes weak and/or mixed. Very open to pressures.</i>	55
5. <i>In happy circumstances, producing a constant mood of tolerance or acceptance. Resistant to pressure.</i>	10
6. <i>Firm principles - political, religious or whatever - giving firm resistance to prejudice.</i>	4
7. <i>Pathological anti-prejudice, maybe including strong preference for minority groups over own group.</i>	1

If this chart is true, most people are not very heavily prejudiced at all - it is a pretty superficial thing for them. And to the extent that this is true, we'd expect to find that the expression of prejudice would vary a lot with the situation.

And this is exactly what we do find. (see fig. 1) A great deal of research has shown that actual discrimination is most easily aroused in the housing situation - it seem to take very little to make neighbours band together to

keep out members of racial groups against which there is potential prejudice. On the other hand, there is also much research to show that in the work situation it is relatively easy to get people to work with members of those same groups. There is something about the situation which makes the difference. What is this something?

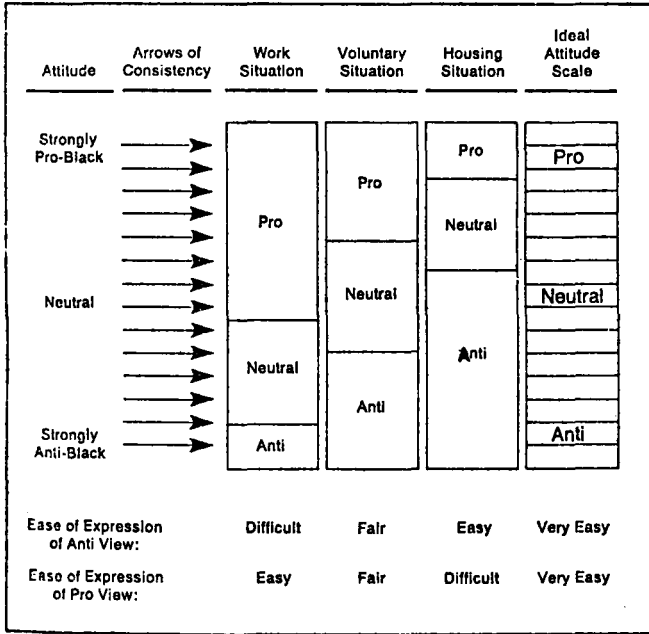


Fig. 1

Situational Pressures

Harry Triandis has done research in the USA, Greece, Japan, India and Germany, and has shown that situations basically vary along one single dimension -from formal through informal to intimate. (see fig 2) In formal situations, such as work, where people interact mainly in terms of their roles, discrimination is mainly in terms of social and occupational status, and not in terms of race.

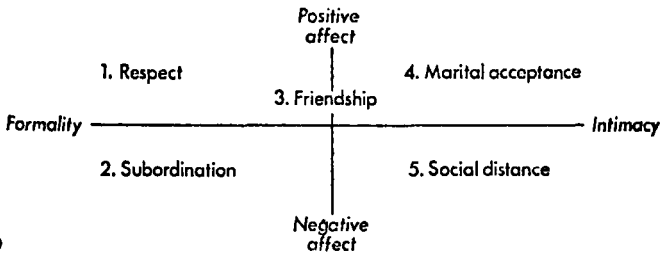


FIG. 2

Accordingly the factors which emerge are about respect and subordination which are essentially "arms-length" matters.

In informal situations, such as everyday interactions with friends and acquaintances, many things enter into the relationship. Triandis found that race was quite important, but no more so than age, or sex, or compatible beliefs. If anything, compatible beliefs appear to be more important in this area, as Rokeach and his coworkers have shown in their research.

In intimate situations, such as marriage, membership of the same club, living next door and so on, race was the most important thing (though in the case of marriage age was just as important). So in this kind of situation, social distance was mainly based on racial prejudice.

What we are now saying, then, is that most people will find it hard to express their prejudices in a formal situation, quite easy in an informal situation, and will be positively encouraged to do so in an intimate situation - or one which could turn into an intimate situation.

Social Norms

But of course this means that the individual expression of prejudice is very dependent on social factors. Prejudice is not just an individual quirk, it is a social norm. There is a good deal of research to show that prejudice is taught. Pushkin in this country found that racial prejudice is present as early as three years old, and already at seven years old a high-prejudice group can be distinguished from a low-prejudice group. He also found that the intensity of prejudice varied from one area to another - an area with a highly visible coloured population produced many more prejudiced children than an area with very few non-whites. In an area where there is a little likelihood of meeting black children, there is no need for parents, even those who may be highly prejudiced, to teach their children directly about them.

If it is normal for society to teach prejudice, why should this be so? How can we best understand what is going on here?

Patriarchy

My own best answer is that we live in a patriarchal society. The male in our culture has put everything into a master-slave mould, involving separation and isolation. It started by dominating women and keeping them at arms' length mentally and emotionally. But it soon came to involve the separation and domination of workers by bosses, of pupils by teachers, of gays by straights, of children by parents - and of course of blacks by whites.

It is important to see what a general pattern this is. The right approach to any problem in our culture can be seen in patriarchal terms as to separate two things and make one of them superior - to conquer or overcome the other. So intellect gets separated from emotion and put on top; the practical gets

separated from the imaginative and put on top; the obvious gets separated from the subtle and put on top. The right thing to do with disease is to conquer it; the right thing to do with the environment is to conquer it; the right thing to do with outer space is to conquer it.

In all these cases the inferior one is tolerated so long as it stays in its place - underneath. As soon as it wants any other position, it gets clobbered. The patriarchal system says - "Do it my way. Use my official channels. Use my language. Use my patterns of thought." And when we do that, we don't get what we want. We get what the system decides is best for us - what fits in, what is not too disturbing to those who run it now.

So what this means is that any attempt to bring about any real change in racial prejudice involves questioning the whole patriarchal set-up. It involves a common struggle with others who also get clobbered by patriarchy. And this is why we have to be careful how we do it. If we are questioning patriarchy, it will not do to do it in a way which reinforces patriarchal patterns. It seems as though for every group which is disadvantaged by patriarchy, the twin purposes must be similar: one to gain equality in the present structure; the other to change the structure so that it no longer puts some up and the others down.

Based on chapters 1, 2 and 10 of **John Rowan**. *The structured crowd*, Davis-Poynter 1978.

Nick Owen

Further Thoughts on Transference

A Review of Carl Gustav Critique of Psychoanalysis: Princeton University Press.

The book I originally set out to review was R. D. Laing's "The facts of Life". I found it more or less impossible to review a tiny book which tries to investigate something as vast and intangible as the meaning of life itself. What I did pick up on was its focus on events prior to birth as very significant in people's lives. What bothered me about this was its place in a current trend to take the causes of our problems further and further back into the past. As a student I learned that it was the Freudian school which taught that everything was determined by our early childhood, and that it was humanistic psychology which focussed on the present possibilities. Looking at the present craze for primal therapy, which in theoretical terms is no more than a return to early Freudian trauma theory, and the enthusiasm generally in the growth movement for greater and greater regression as the answer, I begin to fear for humanistic psychologists' hold on the present.

Then I came across an important humanistic psychologist with his feet firmly