SOCI 324
GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Session 12– Prejudice and Discrimination

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Session Overview

- Prejudice and discrimination are negative forces that result in a drain on human resources whenever and wherever they occur. They often result in violence, intolerance and bloody riots.

- In this session, we shall attempt to understand the conceptsMany people have suggested that to control prejudice, we can simply say identify prejudiced people and talk to them. But should I ask if you are prejudiced, you most likely will be quick to reply that you are not. We often are quick to perceive prejudice and bigotry in others but not in ourselves. And this probably explains why the cycle of hatred continues. It's always others who are dangerous – who can't be trusted – but not us or members of our own group.

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Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- The definition of the concepts of Stereotypes, Prejudice and Discrimination

- The causes, effects and cures for prejudice and Discrimination

- The link between the three concepts

- Sample Question

- Session Summary

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Reading List

- Read chapter six of the required text and the article on this session posted on Sakai.

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Topic One

STEREOTYPES

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What are Stereotypes

- Baron, Branscombe and Byrne (2009) have defined stereotypes as 'beliefs about social groups in terms of the traits or characteristics that they are believed to share'.

- Stereotypes are cognitive frameworks that influence the processing of social information.

- Stereotypes generally are beliefs and expectations that we have concerning what members of out-groups are. Stereotypes can be based on gender, age, ethnicity, religion etc. Thus generally stereotypes cover a wide range of subjects including traits, physical appearance, activity preferences, and behaviors (Biernat and Thompson, 2002).

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What are Stereotypes

- These traits can be positive or negative, accurate or inaccurate, and they can be agreed with or rejected by the members of the stereotyped group (Baron et al, 2009).

- Can you mention some stereotypes you know about other ethnic groups in Ghana? I hope the list you have put up includes stereotypes about your own ethnic group? Do you believe these stereotypes about other groups? What about the stereotypes held by others about your in-group? Why do you believe or not believe these stereotypes?

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Stereotypes and Singlism

- Well Baron et al (2009), suggest that sometimes, people can be victims of stereotypes without even being aware of it.

- In a research by DePaulo in (2006), she found that one group of people who are often stereotyped but who may not be conscious of this are singles. The negative stereotyping and discrimination directed at single people is termed **singlism.** Compared to married people, single people in DePaulo's study were often assessed and viewed in a negative light, especially when the targets are over forty years as compared to when they were twenty year olds. Can you relate this to the Ghanaian setting? Do you think singles are viewed negatively? Which, males or females are viewed more negatively if they are single after say age 40? Can you think of any reasons why singles are stereotyped?

- Well, DePaulo et al (2006) explain that singlism serves to protect and glorify the institution of marriage which leads to procreation and the preservation of society. Thus any behavior (singleness) that challenges the existing belief system, that fulfillment comes from being married is labeled deviant and stigmatized.

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Sources of Stereotypes

- Gender differences are one of the main sources of stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are 'stereotypes concerning the traits possessed by females and males and that distinguish the two genders from each other (Baron et al, 2009).

- Stereotypes of each gender are typically the converse of the other. For instance while women are perceived in a positive light to be kind and nurturing, they are perceived on the negative said to be overly emotional and less competent. The reverse of these attributes is true for men.

- Gender stereotypes are responsible for the glass ceiling- 'barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified females from advancing to top level positions'. Even when women break this glass ceiling, they experience less favorable outcomes in their careers than men because of their gender (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007).

- Besides gender, stereotypes can be based on many different category memberships including age, race, weight, marital status, religion, ethnicity, occupation, educational level sexual orientation, etc.

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Uses of Stereotypes

- **Schemas**: cognitive frameworks for organizing, interpreting and recalling information. If you recall our discussions last semester on attitudes, I said that humans are basically 'cognitive misers'. Thus as much as possible, people prefer to draw conclusions based on shortcuts (such as using stereotypes) instead of engaging in any cognitive exercise in the understanding of any social issue. Thus when possible, people will use simpler, quicker, processes to explain actions and behavior.

- **Positive identity Reinforcement:-** stereotypes make us feel good about our own in-group compared to other out-groups

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Uses of Stereotypes

- **Theories**: stereotypes help us pay attention to specific types of information, usually those consistent with our stereotypes. Thus, should we encounter information that counters our beliefs or stereotypes, we find ways to reorganize these to make it conform to our original beliefs.

- One of the ways to do this is by the creation of subtypes. Research indicates that when we meet someone whose behavior is counter to the stereotypes we hold about that persons group, we do not immediately change our opinion in the face of such evidence. Rather we place such people in a new category (a sub-type) of people who are the exception. This is done so as not to alter the stereotypes we hold about a targeted group as a whole.

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Uses of Stereotypes

- **Constructs:** stereotypes provide us with the information about the typical traits of people belonging to other groups. When these traits are activated, they easily come to mind and are used in our assessment and description of out-group members.

- For example, can you list the traits of University lecturers, lesbians, policemen, charismatic Christians etc. How did you arrive at the traits you listed? You most likely have been able to arrive at these constructs based on some stereotypical information about these groups.

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Do Stereotypes ever change?

- Well some theorists have argued that stereotypes can and do change when;

➢ the relationship between us and the out-group changes. This is when there is a re-categorization that leads to a change in the way we perceive the out-group.

➢ It is also when group membership changes, such that we now come to belong to groups that were formerly an out-group. For example, you may have certain opinions about a political party you do not belong to currently. However, should you cross carpet and join that other political party tomorrow, your views about this party will definitely be altered-different from what you believed previously.

➢ Again stereotypes may change when we begin to perceive conditions in our in-group as less favorable-we then tend to start seeing other out-groups in a positive light. Thus, when our stakes in the current status positions are altered, we tend to alter our opinions and beliefs.

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Topic Two

PREJUDICE & DISCRIMINATION

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What is Prejudice?

- "A special type of attitude generally a negative one toward the members of some distinct social group based solely on them membership in that group. (Baron & Byrne, 2006).

- 'A holistic or negative attitude toward a distinguishable group of people based solely on their mentorship in that group' (Aronson et al, 2007).

- "A harmful attitude based on inaccurate generalizations about a group of people based on their skin color, religion, sex, age, or any other noticeable difference" (Ben Lahey, 2005).

- A negative attitude directed towards people because they are members of a specific social group" (Franzoi, 2003).

Components of Prejudice

- To the extent that it is an attitude, prejudice has the 3 components of attitudes namely:

- The Cognitive component – (beliefs) and expectations, usually negative held by individuals of a particular social group often informed by stereotypes.

- The Affective component – (feelings) and the negative feelings/emotions prejudiced persons experience when in the presence of, or just thinking about special social groups.

- The Behavioral Component – The tendency or intentions to act negatively towards the groups/objects of prejudice. When these intentions translate into overt actions, they constitute **discrimination.**

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Features of Prejudice

- A prejudiced person is one who believes in the inherent inferiority of some group,

- Also one who evaluates people negatively just on the basis of their group identity

- Or one who wishes to avoid or attack someone just on the basis of group membership.

- A prejudiced person (bigot) ignores the individual qualities of people and prejudges them based on a negative evaluation. Hence Sabini (2000) refers to prejudice as 'the beliefs or evaluations to act.

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Features of Prejudice

- Prejudice produces several emotions including anger. (Smith 1993) makes the suggestion that negative emotions such as (anger and contempt) often lead to:

- Actions **against** a social group (e.g. denying them good jobs or housing) while

- Emotions as (fear and disgust) lead to actions **away** from the negatively evaluated group. (e.g. moving away when they sit by you in a bus or move into your neighborhood).

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What is Discrimination?

- Penrod (1996) defines discrimination as 'an overt action taken against members of a group simply because of their group affiliation'.

- To Aronson et al (2007), discrimination is 'an unjustified negative or harmful action toward a member of a group simply because of his or her membership in that group'.

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Topic Three

THE CAUSES OF PREJUDICE

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Causes of Prejudice

- **Inter-Group Conflict (Competition as a source of Bias):** This theory argues that people become prejudiced towards others because they are in conflict with them over real, material and tangible resources, or in competition (conflict) with them over valued commodities or opportunities. As the competition goes on, members of different groups come to see other groups as "enemies" wanting to take the very things they want.

- In the face of competition or conflict people react in different ways. They tend to view themselves and their group as superior and draw distinct boundaries between them and their opponents.

- In addition conflict produces not only hostility to the out-group but also intensifies loyalty to the in-group. The pattern of hostility to others and intense loyalty to the in-group is referred to as **Ethnocentrism**

Causes of Prejudice

- **Social categorization (Us versus Them- Out-group Homogeneity):** This is the tendency to divide the world into two separate categories (our in-group (us) and various out-groups (them). Such divisions are based on such dimensions as race religion, ethnicity, age, sex etc.

- Beliefs and feelings about these groups are different because people tend to be more favorable to their in-groups and not other out-groups. The latter are seen to possess undesirable traits and seen as more homogenous (all the same) so that the tendency is to judge them before you even get to know or interact with them. In-group bias results in selectively remembering in-group member's good behavior and out-group people bad behavior. It also includes selectively forgetting or trivializing in-group member's bad behavior and out-group member's good behavior.

Causes of Prejudice

- Research indicates that the illusion of out-group homogeneity is more likely to occur among competing groups than non-competing groups.

- Though out-groups are considered homogenous, in-groups are seen as distinct and complex. A manifestation of out-group homogeneity effect is seen in the difficulty in correctly identifying people of other races.

- However, when the boundaries of us/them shifts and out-group people become part of us, prejudice towards them disappears.

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Causes of Prejudice

- **Prejudice learned through Socialization ('Bigots are made not born'-Berk-1998):** The argument here is that prejudice like other complex forms of behavior is largely learned. It is suggested that children acquire negative attitudes towards others because they hear these views being expressed by parents or they are rewarded (praise/approval) for adopting them.

- Besides observation/reinforcements, social norms also influence prejudice. If the norms indicate which actions are appropriate and all ordinary members of a society conform to group laws and norms (then if these norms are based on prejudiced and discrimination), people automatically become prejudiced (out of learning/imbibing group norms) e.g. The norms of apartheid that existed in South Africa some year back.

- The mass media is also influential in this regard. Until recently members of racial/ethnic minorities have been rarely shown on the television, and if shown at all, in a negative light (low status/conic roles). Hence for these periods, children and people in general came to perceive such minorities as inferior – because that is how they have been portrayed in the media.

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Causes of Prejudice

- **Religion and Prejudice:** Research has found a positive correlation between religion and prejudice. It has been suggested that one's level of religious involvement was closely correlated with the prejudiced attitude held.

- It was found that organized religion was associated with increased prejudice and bigotry. The explanation given is that people belong to religious groups for different reasons which are **extrinsic** – where religion is a means of gaining social rewards (meeting people/business contacts etc.) and **intrinsic** - where religion is a central part of the individuals' self concept – providing him with a frame of reference and defining his total world view. "The extrinsically minded person **uses** his religion, while the intrinsically motivated person, **lives** his religion (Franzoi, 2000).

- The evidence points to the fact that in some cases intrinsically motivated persons express less prejudice than extrinsically motivated persons, while in other cases they express more. Basically, while some religious teaching or beliefs may reduce prejudice, others may actually fan the flames of bigotry.

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Causes of Prejudice

- **Authoritarian Personality and Prejudice:** Adorno et al (1950) linked prejudice to personality conflicts developed during childhood. Such personalities resulted from harsh childbearing practices that taught children to repress their hostility towards authority and instead redirect or displace it onto less powerful targets who could not retaliate.

- People with authoritarian personalities adhere rigidly to conventional values and tend to be prejudiced toward out-groups. A trait peculiar to all prejudiced people (despite the object or group of prejudice) is that they are (uptight) and filled with as much fear and hatred.

- Research has pointed to the fact that people who are socialized by authoritarian and strict disciplinarians tend to develop similar tendencies because they model and reinforce this intolerant worldview.

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Topic Three

PREVENTION/CONTROL OF PREJUDICE

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Preventing Prejudice

- **Breaking the Cycle of Prejudice – (Learning not to Hate):** The logic is that if prejudice is largely learned from parents, peers and other adults, then one useful technique to reduce it is to encourage people especially parents and other adults from providing then offspring with training in bigotry but rather to train them to develop positive views and attitudes towards others.

Preventing Prejudice

- **Direct Inter-Group Contact (Contact Hypothesis**): The contact hypothesis suggests that prejudice is reduced with increasing contact between different groups. This is made possible because contact:

- Allows for a growing recognition of similarities between the different interacting groups and the perceived similarity can generate and enhance mutual attraction.

- Provides an opportunity for sufficient information that are inconsistent with stereotypes – resulting in the crumbling of stereotypes that feed prejudice

- Helps to counter the notions of out-group homogeneity.

Making Interaction Effective

- **Equal Status of the Interacting Groups**: The groups interacting must be roughly equal in social, economic and task related status. If they differ sharply, communication may be difficult and prejudice might actually increase.

- **Interacting groups must have a common goal:** the contact situation must involve cooperation and inter-dependence, with the group working towards shared goals.

- The contact must be informal so as to enable group members interact and get to know each other on a personal, one-on-one basis.

- **Social Norms of Equality**: Contact must occur in a setting where existing norms favor group equality.

- The persons involved must view each other as typical of their respective groups, only then will they generalize their pleasant contacts to other persons/situations.

Preventing Prejudice

- **Re-categorization (Redrawing the boundaries):** This refers to shifts in the boundary between individuals in-group (us) and some out-group (others). As a result of such re-categorization, persons formerly viewed as out-group members may now be viewed as belonging to the same in-group, leading to a reduction in bias.

- **Interventions designed to reduce the impact of stereotypes** to induce individuals to pay careful attention to others and to understand them and their unique attributes rather than the group to which they belong – might prove highly effective in reducing prejudice.

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Topic Four

LINKING STEREOTYPES, PREJUDICE & DISCRIMINATION

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Link between Stereotypes-Prejudice-Discrimination

- Although stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination have been used interchangeably in the literature, they are not exactly the same. Social psychologists have drawn a distinction between the three.

- Stereotypes are considered to belong to the **cognitive aspect** of attitudes towards a social group. Thus, it is negative stereotypes (the beliefs), that induce prejudice (affective hostility) and subsequent discrimination (behavior/action) against out-groups or members of the targeted group.

References

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