
Prejudice: the Causes, and the Possibility of Reduction

While many of us may like to believe that our society today as we know it has advanced in many ways beyond the thoughts and beliefs of the colonial era and the time of slavery, this is unfortunately not the case. In many ways, public policy and societal beliefs may have shifted in ways which make us believe prejudice and racism have been on the decline, but in the sad reality, the ideologies associated with the two are no longer socially acceptable. According to Tetlock and Mitchell (2008), 75% of one million plus whites who have taken the IAT (Implicit Association Test), which predicts the propensity to discriminate against target groups in a variety of ways and settings, scored unconsciously prejudiced against African-Americans. Thus, those who have long favored what these ideas represent still harbor such feelings and simply keep them hidden, expressing their true colors in private or among those whom they feel comfortable sharing that type of information with, until something eventually occurs which triggers an outburst. Case in point: the infamous drunken, racially charged outburst by Mel Gibson which occurred a few years ago. However, even before the 1980s, when the War on Drugs was declared at a time when drug use and crime were on the decline, the policy was intended to target poor black neighborhoods and since then, public policy has shaped ideas of prejudice and racism. A more recent example is the Muslim ban put into effect by President Trump. This leads to the question of what causes prejudice and how can we attempt to reduce it even just slightly? The following briefly examines these questions and offers insights from research seeking answers to these questions.

Prejudice and racism are so ingrained in our society that in many ways, most people do not even recognize the subtle ways in which this is true. This can be observed almost daily, depending on where you live, through racial and ethnic jokes by those who oftentimes are unaware of the hurtful nature of the context. The media aids in the promotion of stereotypes which fuel prejudice and racist ideologies. Furthermore, because the media acts as an implicit influence on the subconscious, the message is not conveyed through words but by images. For example, take mostly any anti-drug ad. Anti-drug ads unfortunately tend to feature poor black people who appear in poor health in desperate situations. Prejudice develops as a response to the perceived threat of others, whether this is a woman, a homosexual, or another racial/ethnic group. In this regard, it may be shaped and promoted through public policy. Beyond these apparent causes for prejudice, some sociologists maintain prejudice is shaped by unconscious negative thoughts which are very difficult for a person to consciously control on an intentional level. In this regard, it may be argued the earliest ideologies concerned with prejudice and race since the founding of the United States have played a significant role in the existence and promotions of prejudice within our society because they remain deeply embedded part of our history and mindset no matter how hard we try to change this pattern of thinking. Many people

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today are inherently racist and/or prejudice, even without them actually realizing they may be saying or doing condescending things towards someone of an opposite race or color, and this can be caused by what they have seen their parents do or say, or just any of their peers in general. A lot of people do this intentionally, too, in order to fit in with certain crowds depending on where they are at and who they are with, as well as those people who may be around.

This leads us to one of the most important questions regarding this topic: how do we combat such a damaging aspect of society as prejudice? Tetlock and Mitchell (2008) contend that no one really knows what methods will work in the battle against implicit prejudice and the resulting acts of discrimination and Paluck and Green (2009) tend to agree. In their study, Paluck and Green (2009) tested theories and interventions based on and ranging from cooperative learning through Social Interdependence Theory, peer influence through Social Norm Theory, cognitive training regarding implicit prejudice through classical conditioning, conflict resolution through interactive conflict resolution models, and everything in between. All findings concluded further research was needed in order to determine how to reduce/correct the problem of prejudice. Thus, it appears social and psychological studies, at this point, can offer little aid. For our part, as citizens, the best we can do is work to persuade others that every human being is a person deserving of equal treatment and compassion. Since there is no correct way of fixing these issues, and does not seem to be showing a sign of an aid anytime soon, the only thing we can do is be kind to one another, and show respect and give every single person the same amount of love and respect you would give someone of your own race. We all need to make an example for everyone else, especially our younger generations, and teach every one of our children to respect one another regardless of someone's skin or background. We all need to play our part in order to ever make a dent in both racism and prejudices.

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