Chapter 3

Reducing Prejudice:
How Achievable? How Important?

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**Key Concepts**

- Persuasive Communication as a Tool to Reduce Prejudice
- Education as a Tool to Reduce Prejudice
- The Contact Hypothesis
- Simulation Exercises
- Therapy as a Tool to Reduce Prejudice

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There are **two goals** in this chapter. One is to **explore methods of combating prejudice**. The other goal is to **discuss whether prejudice is an important cause of discrimination**.

### I. Reducing Prejudice:
Some Principles and Approaches

Given that there are many causes of prejudice: personality, social, and structural, the solutions are going to be varied also. If, for example, prejudice is related to a personality trait, then education might not eliminate prejudice. On the other hand, if prejudice is due to social learning, education and personal contact may reduce prejudice (Farley, 2000:37-38).

#### A. Persuasive Communication

1. **Description**

   Persuasive communication refers to any form of communication (written, verbal, visual) **specifically intended to influence attitudes**. A couple of considerations are in order (Farley, 2000:38-42).
Success depends, in part, on who is giving the message. A communication must be heard. The credibility of the source is important is bringing about long-term change in attitudes. The message must be understood. Receiving the message must be a positive experience. The message must be retained. A failure at any points means that no persuasion will take place.

2. **Drawbacks**

It appears that people who receive and understand antiprejudiced messages tend to be people who are already antiprejudiced (Farley, 2000:38-42).

- People who are highly prejudiced tend to not hear the messages. One explanation is that most people tend to not like to have their beliefs seriously challenged. When this happens they either ignore or rationalize away the message.
- Whether one hears the message depends on why the person is prejudiced in the first place. For example, people who are prejudiced as a result of an authoritarian personality will not hear the message.
- Further, prejudiced people tend to not view themselves as prejudiced. Therefore, when the message is heard, it is assumed that it applies to someone else.
- A further concern is that as prejudice becomes more subtle, it becomes easier to rationalize it away (Farley, 2000:38-42).

**B. Education**

1. **Description**

Intergroup education is similar to persuasive communication. The big difference is that education's purpose is not to change attitudes, but rather to impart information, although the latent goal of changing minds might be there. Education is most successful when it causes the least amount of stress. I.e., education should not put people on the defensive. One way to facilitate a positive environment is to make students feel that they are participants in the process (Farley, 2000:42-45).

2. **Drawbacks**

Education has difficulties reducing prejudice, in part, because there is some self-selecting taking place in that the most prejudiced people probably do not take the courses designed to increase the understanding of majority/minority issues. On the other hand, required courses in intergroup relations might avoid the problem of self-selection.

Teachers, like other people, are some times prejudiced. If the teacher is prejudiced against minorities, then it would be difficult to promote a non-
prejudiced environment.

In general, education appears to be most beneficial in reducing prejudice when prejudice is not very intense and when personality disorders are not dominant (Farley, 2000:42-45).

If a person is prejudiced as a result of social learning, then education (combined with change of environment) may be successful in reducing prejudice.

This tends to be one of my biases. I kind of operate under the philosophy that if one provides valid information regarding a social problem, then people will automatically act to resolve the social problem once they understand its dynamics. This, many times, is a faulty assumption. -- Russ

C. Intergroup Contact: The Contact Hypothesis

1. Description

Intergroup contact appears more effective in reducing prejudice than communication and education. This "contact hypothesis" receives support in public housing projects where people have to live in close proximity to each another. It also receives support in the military. It appears, for example, that school desegregation is associated with decreasing levels of prejudice (Farley, 2000:45-51). This is the philosophy behind school-busing.

The contact has to be more than superficial. Casual contact will have little impact on reducing prejudice.

Sherif's "Robber's Cave" Experiment.

Sherif and his colleagues divided a group of boys attending scout camp into two groups and then placed the groups in difficult and frustrating situations. Eventually the two groups became very hostile toward each other.

How did the experimenters get the hostility between the two groups to dissipate? They set up a situation where the two groups were interdependent and had to cooperate (Farley, 2000:49).

2. Drawbacks

a. A primary problem here is that the lessening of prejudice appears to only take place in the environment where the contact takes place (e.g., the school or work place)

b. The contact hypothesis does not always receive support. Examples are the school desegregation problems found in Boston and Pontiac, MI. It appears that a precondition for intergroup contact to work in reducing
prejudice is that the two groups be on equal status. For example, prejudice is reduced when the two groups are working on the same job for the same pay or living in a housing project where each pays the same rent. If people are not of equal status, contact may foster resentment (Farley, 2000:45-51).

D. Simulation Exercises

The simulation exercise devises a situation where people, who don't normally experience prejudice and discrimination, experience discrimination. They learn about the feelings that result from being discriminated against. They see in a direct way the irrationality of prejudice and discrimination (Farley, 2000:51).

E. Therapy

1. Description

Communication, education, and intergroup contact are not effective when a prejudiced person suffers from personality problems. Many argue that personality problems are best dealt with through therapy (either individual or group therapy). The goal of therapy is to:

- Resolve the problem that caused people to be prejudiced in the first place.
- Convince prejudiced people that prejudice is not an appropriate way of dealing with one's insecurities or problems (Farley, 2000:52-53).

2. Drawbacks

The authoritarian personality is an example of prejudice that results from personality disorders. Unfortunately, a characteristic of the authoritarian personality is Anti-Intracception, or a rejection of self analysis. If one doesn't acknowledge they have a problem requiring therapy, then they won't see a need to seek therapy.

II. How Important is Prejudice?

There is substantial evidence which suggests that the prejudice and discrimination are not always linked.

The LaPiere Study

The 1936 experiment by LaPiere demonstrates this. He noted that as he and his Chinese traveling-partner attempted to stay at hotels, only one hotel refused them service, but when he contacted the hotels by mail asking if they would serve Chinese, many hotels indicated that they would not provide service to Chinese. The moral of this story is that people with prejudiced attitudes do not always display discriminatory behavior (Farley, 2000:55)
A. Merton’s Typology on Prejudice and Discrimination

Merton demonstrates that prejudice and discrimination do not necessarily go hand in hand. One can, for example, be prejudice without discriminating (EX: The office manager who is convinced that women are inferior employees, but who still treats men and women as equals). One can also discriminate without being prejudice (EX: The southern white restaurant owner during Jim Crow who felt in his heart that inequality between the races was wrong, but who still refused to service blacks for fear of being burned out by other whites (Farley, 2000:55-56).

One might speculate that, regarding timid bigots and fair weather liberals, that social pressure explains the ambivalence.

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<td>Does Not Discriminate</td>
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Source: Farley (2000:56)

B. Cognitive Dissonance Theory: Can Behavior Determine Attitudes?

The general answer to this question appears to be yes. Farley (2000:57) calls upon Cognitive Dissonance Theory for an explanation on how this can be true. He argues that people prefer to have their attitudes and behavior in sync. The theory argues that if behavior does not match attitudes then people will slowly, unconsciously, change their attitudes.

The Carlsmith (1959) Experiment

The Carlsmith Experiment lends proof to the theory that behaviors cause attitudes.

Subject were divided into two groups. Each group is asked to perform dull boring tasks. One group is paid money. The other receives nothing substantial.

Those who receive money acknowledge that the work was boring, but they could rationalize doing the boring work because they were paid to do the work. That alone made the project worthwhile.

The group receiving no money, on the other hand, had no way to justify their experience. That groups slowly changed their attitudes such that many in the group who received nothing said the tasks were enjoyable (Farley, 2000:57).
2. The Deep South Today

Farley (2000:57) contends that cognitive dissonance theory explains why the South desegregation was so successful. He argues that Southerners, not being able to discriminate any longer, changed their attitudes toward discrimination.

C. Prejudice and Discrimination in America Today

Farley (2000:57-59) states a case that discrimination and prejudice is not as important in promoting racial inequality as it was once in the past. Studies indicate that many forms of prejudice is in decline. Blatant negative stereotyping is not as prevalent. On the other hand, positive stereotyping is up.

**Social Distance Scales: The Bogardus Scale**

Farley (2000:60) notes that people from a variety of different ethnic groups are willing to accept greater levels of closeness than in the past.

Social Distance scales provide an assessment of the social status of a group. Respondents are asked whether they would admit members of minorities to a variety of situations, ranging from close kinship by marriage, to living close by as neighbors, to exclusion from the country.

Note: There are two issues to consider when assessing social distance. On one hand one should note the amount of distance that is tolerated between groups from one time to the next. One can also consider the relative position of the group compared to other groups.

In Bogardus's measure of social distance (1968), data suggests that Americans are much more tolerant of other groups now than in the past. On the other hand, there was very little difference over time in the ranking of minority groups. Native Americans, Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Mexicans, blacks, and Indians from India clustered on the bottom end of the scale in the 1930s and still held their socially undesirable positions four decades later (Kitano, 1985:39).

D. Symbolic Racism

Symbolic, or modern, racism comes from people who reject stereotypes and blatant discrimination while resisting any program designed to enable minorities to escape poverty.

Farley (2000:63-64) argues that this form of prejudice is based on the feeling that minorities are getting an unfair advantage and that they violate the American norms of individualism and self-reliance. He goes on to say that a key element of this belief is the denial of the presence of racial inequality in society. The feeling among many white Americans is that minorities have equal or greater chance to get ahead compared to whites. Farley (2000:63-64) contends that this belief is preposterous.
given that one black child in two live in poverty. He argues that an argument can be made that prejudice is still around, although it has changed its form.