Discrimination and Conflict Reading

Although the concepts of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination appear to logically work together, psychologists have struggled to explain how and if we move from simply categorizing people to eventually discriminating against a member of an out-group. It is well-known among psychologists that people may hold prejudice against specific groups but this does not mean that they actually discriminate against them.

The link between prejudice and discrimination was investigated in a classic study from 1934. LaPierre (1934) wanted to investigate a possible relationship between prejudice and discrimination against Chinese immigrants in hotels and restaurants in the USA. According to LaPierre questionnaires provide limited information on how people will act in a specific situation. His idea was that social attitudes can only be reliably measured by studying human behavior in actual social situations. And this was what he did.

From 1930 to 1932, LaPierre traveled around the USA with a young Chinese couple to 66 different hotels and 184 restaurants and cafes. According to LaPierre, they were treated well and only rejected once. After six months LaPierre sent a questionnaire to all the establishments that they had visited, asking them if they were willing to accept members of "the Chinese race" as guests. He received replies from 81 of the restaurants and 47 of the hotels. 92% of the restaurants that responded said "no." For the hotels, 91 % said "no". It appears that when asked a hypothetical question, the staff wrote of their intention to discriminate; however, this was not true when they were actually face-to-face with Chinese customers. According to LaPierre, there were a number of contextual variables that could have influenced the behavior of the personnel towards the Chinese couple. First of all, they were charming and spoke excellent English, were in the company of a Caucasian gentleman, and arrived by car. Moreover, the study was carried out during the Great Depression when times were hard, and business owners were probably eager to receive people when faced with actual customers. It was much easier to say "No" when the same establishments received a hypothetical question by mail.

The study was a pioneering study at the time in terms of methodology, partly because it showed that a self-report on a hypothetical situation is not valid without reference to actual social behavior. According to Wicker (1971) who did a review of research on attitudes and behavior, there is only a weak correlation, if any, between measured attitudes and actual behavior. There are some limitations to LaPierre's study. First, the simple yes-no answers to the questions in the questionnaire are not necessarily valid measures of a person's attitude toward a specific group of people. Also, since not all establishments responded, this points towards a racial bias in the establishments that actually took time to answer the questionnaires. Finally, there was no follow-up that asked why they would refuse to take the Chinese customers.

In a recent study, Moss-Racusin (2012) wanted to see if faculty at universities would demonstrate a gender bias that would disadvantage women looking to pursue careers in the sciences. In her study, two resumés for a lab assistant position were given to science professors across the United States. The only difference in the two resumés was the name – one applicant was Jennifer and the other

John. The sample was made up of over 100 biologists, chemists, and physicists. They were randomly assigned one of the two resumés.

The results were that although the qualifications were exactly the same, Jennifer was rated as less competent than John. When asked to recommend a salary based on their qualifications, Jennifer was offered, on average, 13% less than John. Lest you think that this is simply another example of male discrimination against women, even women scientists favored John over Jennifer! Since resumés are usually ranked before interviews are given to choose an applicant, this study indicates that discrimination may have a significant effect on women getting a job in the sciences.

Inter-group Conflict

Discrimination can be such an institutionalized part of society that it becomes accepted as "normal." When tensions between groups lead to aggression, then we define this as conflict. Conflict occurs when what one group wants, another group sees as harmful to its interests.

According to Muzafer Sherif's Realistic Group Conflict Theory, intergroup conflict may arise as a result of conflicting goals or competition over limited resources. The theory predicts that groups that are positively interdependent - that is, they work toward common goals - will have good intergroup relations. However, groups that are negatively interdependent - that is, they are in competition for limited resources or have conflicting goals - will lead to feelings of prejudice, acts of discrimination, and even overt hostility. For example, the theory predicts that socio-economically vulnerable individuals are more likely to have negative attitudes toward immigration due to a perception of ethnic competition for scarce resources such as jobs, housing, economic benefits, and social services. Sherif's classic study not only demonstrates the role of competition in conflict but also how this conflict can be resolved.

Research in Psychology: Sherif et al. (1956)

The Robbers Cave Experiment

The aim of this field experiment was to study groups and observe the natural development of group organization, prejudice, and group norms. The study also tested 'Realistic conflict theory'.

The participants were 22 boys, aged 11-12. The sample was carefully chosen so that all of the boys were healthy, socially well-adjusted, and from stable, White, Protestant, middle-class homes. None of the boys knew each other before the study. This was done in order to reduce the chances of bringing established social conflicts to the study.

The researchers organized a summer camp in the Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma with camp staff. The boys did not know that they were taking part in an experiment. This was done to secure the ecological validity of the research. The researchers collected data by making written records of the observed behavior and sometimes using cameras and microphones.

Part one of the study: The boys were divided into two groups. They participated in a range of challenging activities such as hikes, camp-outs, athletics, and sports. In each group, the boys divided

up the tasks and organized duties. The hierarchy of each group became obvious as leaders emerged, and each group developed its own way of interacting with special jargon, jokes, secrets, and special way of performing tasks. They maintained social control by ridiculing boys who did not perform well at a particular task. Each group selected a symbol and a name that was put on their baseball caps and T-shirts. The groups called themselves The Eagles and The Rattlers.

Part two of the study: The researchers introduced conflict through games in this phase. The games started well but the boys soon called each other names such as 'stinkers' and 'cheaters'. The boys refused contact with the opposing group and they even turned against their previous friends. The boys also gave negative ratings to boys in the other group. In this stage, solidarity increased within each group and they showed hostility towards the other group such as stealing the other group's flag and setting fire to it. The boys also had fights, and there were incidents of bullying. This confirmed that conflict and negative attitudes between groups can arise from group identity and fighting for resources.

Part three of the study: The researchers wanted to bring the conflict between the groups to a stop. Initial attempts to reconcile the groups were not successful so they developed another hypothesis that working together to reach a common goal would encourage a positive relationship between the groups. They created a series of situations such as making the camp truck break down during an outing where the boys had to cooperate to pull the truck. The introduction of these "superordinate goals" eased the tension between the groups. The result was that cooperation led to less negative ratings of the other group and the end of any intergroup hostility.

The methodology of Sherif's study is quite inventive. The measures of social behavior that were introduced were part of real-life situations. This assured a high degree of ecological validity. However, since it was a field experiment, the researchers could not control all the variables; for example, the role of the leaders of each group may have played a significant role in the boys' behavior, rather than simply the fact that they were in a competitive situation. Another concern is how the dependent variable was measured. Sherif argued that there was an increase in hostility, but there was no reliable way in which this was measured, outside of acts taken by individuals in the group. Finally, there are ethical concerns in this study as the researchers deceived the boys by not informing them that they were in an experiment and then they instigated conflict between the groups which resulted in some boys being bullied.

A final limitation has to do with the ability to generalize the findings. In addition to the fact that the sample was all male, American, and middle-class, all the participants came to the camp voluntarily. As a result, the groups had equal status. This is not often the case when we see inter-group conflict, so the results may be generalized to produce theories of inter-group conflict, but it is not possible to generalize to a wider population.

The study revealed one of the ways that intergroup conflict and negative intergroup attitudes may emerge but also a possible way to reduce conflict between groups. The study has been used to explain how racial prejudice and discrimination may arise between ethnic groups as a result of competition for resources. However, this appears to be just one explanation for intergroup prejudice and conflict.

Research on Realistic Group Conflict Theory may help to explain prejudice and anti-immigrant feelings. Research by Quillian (1995) on attitudes in the EU found that the economic conditions in a country and the size of the immigrant group influenced levels of prejudice toward the immigrant group. However, this research is only correlational in nature and does not account for other variables that may influence such attitudes, such as the role of the media.

When Tyerman and Spencer (1983) tried to replicate Sherif's study with scouts that already knew each other, they did not find that competition led to conflict. This does not mean that Sherif's original findings are not valid - only that more research is needed. In a study by Struch and Schwartz (1989) hostility and prejudice among members of religious groups toward other religious groups were studied. The findings were that those that most strongly identified with their group demonstrated the greatest level of hostility. So, perhaps conflict for resources alone cannot explain inter-group conflict. It appears that Social Identity Theory could also be an important factor in understanding the roots of prejudice, discrimination, and conflict between groups.

Social Identity and Communication in the Escalation of Conflict

McDoom (2012) argues that group polarization makes conflict more possible. Group polarization is the phenomenon where the decisions and opinions of people in a group become more extreme than their actual, privately held beliefs. Group polarization leads to the belief that the in-group can do no wrong and their motives are positive. On the other hand, the out-group can do nothing right and their motives are negative. The in-group justifies their behavior because of situational factors, whereas they see the out-group's behavior as the result of character flaws or dispositions.

McDoom's steps toward group polarization

McDoom argued that group polarization follows four steps, all of which are linked to the Social Identity Theory:

- Boundary activation: As a threat grows, there is an increased need to distinguish between members of one's in-group and the out-group.
- Out-group negativity: The greater the threat, the greater the references that denigrate the out-group.
- Out-group homogenization: As the threat continues, all members of the out-group are seen as having the same negative characteristics.
- In-group solidarity: This is where polarization is complete - the greater the threat, the stronger the demand for in-group loyalty. Those who are not seen as loyal to the group are punished or excluded.

When the feeling of "us vs. them" is highly salient, discussions with members of the in-group validate one's opinions and discredits the views of those outside the group. In addition, as discussions about the out-group are held publicly, this leads to a public commitment to the group's views.

McDoom carried out a case study of the Rwandan genocide that included a content analysis of Radio Milles Collines broadcasts, surveys, and then follow-up interviews. He wanted to see if the threat of

war would lead to these four steps and thus direct conflict between groups – in this case, the Hutus and the Tutsis.

He wanted to compare data from the North and South of Rwanda; the North had a high threat during the war. There were civilian casualties and the local people were displaced by the fighting. In the South the threat level was low. The communities in the South were not the victims of wartime violence; they did not have to flee their communities, and generally, they relied on the radio and second-hand sources for news of the war.

McDoom found that over time, Radio Milles Collines' language became much more negative about the out-group – referring to the Tutsis as cockroaches and demanding that they leave the country. But most significantly, as the fear was stoked by the radio and the war continued, a clear difference emerged between the North and the South.

Research Methods in Psychology

McDoom carried out an archival analysis of the transcripts of the Milles Collines broadcasts. Here is an example of two of the excerpts that he obtained in his research. The first one is from the Southern part of Rwanda, where there was not very much fighting. The second one is from Northern Rwanda, where most of the fighting took place. Can you see what the key difference is between the two interviews?

Everyone was afraid – not just the Hutu but also the Tutsi as they had both heard there was war. But there were no problems between Hutu and Tutsi as a result here. There was nothing bad said about the Tutsi at the time. Perhaps people said it in their huts, but they did not say it to me.

--Véronique, Hutu woman married to Tutsi farmer, Southern Rwanda

When the Rwandan Patriotic Front [Tutsi] attacked the country the trust between us and the Hutu was broken. The Hutus began to say that it was us who had started the war against Rwanda and that we were making them suffer for it. The Hutu began to control all our activities. When the president's plane was shot down, we were hunted like wild animals. My wife and children were killed in these operations. I had fled and hid myself in the bushes. It was by the grace of God that they did not find me.

--Constantin, Tutsi farmer, Northern Rwanda

As the threat increased, the "us vs. them" was more salient – what McDoom calls "boundary activation" took place. This was followed by an increase in the negative language against the Tutsis – both in the media and in the communities. In March 1994 as the genocide began, all Tutsis were seen as being the same and if you were a good Hutu, you needed to agree that they needed to die. But this was only the case in the North where there was a threat. Without this threat – which was not just about resources, but about their identity – the conflict in the South was minimized.

Studying the Rwandan genocide – or any other conflict – gives us a better understanding of the nature of conflict than the field studies carried out by Sherif and others. However, although studying a

real conflict may be high in ecological validity, lacking the artificiality of experimental research, it cannot be carried out during the actual conflict for obvious reasons. This means that the data must be gathered and analyzed "post-facto." This is problematic as it means that we must rely on self-reported data. Those who were involved in the genocide may not feel comfortable or safe talking to an outsider about their role in the war. In addition, the power of the group may still hold sway – meaning that they will remain loyal and only give the "party line." More importantly, there is the problem of reconstructive memory. It is also unlikely that the individuals involved in the conflict can actually explain what they were thinking at the time.

McDoom's application of Social Identity Theory to the Rwandan Genocide describes how society was polarized, but it does not explain how this polarization led to violence.