Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination

H. Tajfel
1970
Bell Ringer

• Define the difference between prejudice and discrimination using examples
Prejudice is an attitude (usually negative) toward the member of some group solely on their membership in that group.

Discrimination can be seen as the behavioral expression of prejudice.

Psychological theories which attempt to explain the origins of prejudice fall into two major categories.

Personality theories - the source of prejudice as being in the individual

Social psychological theories - prejudice as a result of group membership.
Bell Ringer

• Vying for the Prize
  1. “Competition has been shown to be useful up to a certain point and no further, but cooperation, which is the thing we must strive for today, begins where competition leaves off.” – Franklin D. Roosevelt – To what extend do you agree with the quote?
  2. Explain the N-Effect in terms of running a race.
  3. People evaluate their own abilities and opinions by comparing them to the abilities and opinions of others. Point to positive and negative implications of this mentality.
  4. Evaluate as a group if there is a “healthy level of competition” or if all competition.
Many social psychological theories argue that society may be much more important than personality types in accounting for prejudice. Such theories see prejudice as a result of group membership and group interaction.
An interesting social psychological approach was demonstrated by Sherif. Sherif (1966) believes that prejudice arises out of conflict between two groups. For example when two groups want to achieve the same goal but cannot both have it, hostility is produced between them.

Increased competition between various groups during periods of economic decline, for example, may be one of the factors contributing to prejudice.
Tajfel like Sherif believes that the personality approach is inadequate in explaining prejudice and he also uses a social psychological approach. However, Tajfel et al (1971) argue that ‘competition’ is not a sufficient condition for inter-group conflict and hostility. Tajfel does not deny the importance of ‘competition’ between groups, personality types as explanations for the origins of prejudice but argues that mere perception of the existence of another group can itself produce discrimination. Tajfel et al argue that, before any discrimination can occur, people must be categorised as members of an in-group or an out-group, but more significantly the very act of categorisation by itself produces conflict and discrimination.
Background

• By in-group we mean a group to which a person belongs, or thinks he or she belongs.

• By out-group we mean a group to which a person does not belong, or thinks he or she does not belong.
The aim of Tajfel’s study was to demonstrate that merely putting people into groups (categorization) is sufficient for people to discriminate in favor of their own group and against members of the other group.
The study consisted of two laboratory experiments. The independent variable was the type of allocation they were asked to make and the dependent variable was the choices they made (either being fair or showing discrimination).
The First Experiment (under-estimators and over-estimators)

- The subjects were 64 boys, 14 and 15 years old from a comprehensive school in a suburb of Bristol.
- The subjects came to the laboratory in separate groups of 8. All of the boys in each of the groups were from the same house in the same form at the school, so that they knew each other well before the experiment.
- The first part of the experiment served to establish an intergroup categorization.
EXPERIMENT ONE

At first the boys were brought together in a lecture room and were told that the experimenters were interested in the study of visual judgments. Forty clusters of varying numbers of dots were flashed on a screen and the boys were asked to record each estimate in succession on prepared score sheets.
Bell Ringer

- You are going to be divided into two groups:
  - The Tennis shoe Group
  - The Non-Tennis shoe group

- The "tennis shoe" group is assigned to list as many reasons as it can think of as to why the members of the other group did not wear tennis shoes that day. The non-tennis shoe group is assigned to list as many reasons as it can as to why the other group members are wearing tennis shoes.

- You will have three minutes!!
EXPERIMENT ONE

• There were 2 conditions in the first part of the experiment. In one condition, after the boys had completed their estimates they were told that in judgments of this kind some people consistently overestimate the number of dots and some consistently underestimate the number, but that these tendencies are in no way related to accuracy. (‘under-estimators - over-estimators’ condition).

• In the other condition the boys were told that some people are consistently more accurate than others. (‘better’ - ‘worse’ condition).

• 4 groups of 8 served in each of the two conditions.
EXPERIMENT ONE

- After the judgments had been made and scored by the experimenter the boys were told that they were going to be grouped on the basis of the visual judgments they had just made. The subjects were actually assigned to groups at random.
- The 2nd part of the experiment aimed to assess the effects of categorization on intergroup behavior.
EXPERIMENT ONE

• The subjects were taken to separate cubicles and told which group they were in. The students were given a booklet of matrices and told that the task would consist of giving to others rewards and penalties in real money.

• The boys would not know the identity of the individuals to whom they would be assigning these rewards and penalties since everyone would be given a code number.

• The value of each point they were rewarding – a tenth of a penny.

• Each row of the matrix was labeled “These are reward and penalties for member no. ..... of your group” or “..... of the other group”. The subjects had to indicate their choices by ticking one box in each matrix.
EXPERIMENT ONE

• The boys were required to make three types of choice.
• 1. There were in-group choices, where both top and bottom row referred to members of the same group as the boy. (other than himself)
• 2. There were out-group choices, with both top and bottom row referred to members of the different group from the boy.
• 3. There were intergroup choices, where one row referred to the boys’ own group and one row referred to the other group.
EXPERIMENT ONE

• The important choice for Tajfel is the intergroup choice.

• Below is an example of a matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>-19</th>
<th>-16</th>
<th>-13</th>
<th>-10</th>
<th>-7</th>
<th>-4</th>
<th>-1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>-16</td>
<td>-19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXPERIMENT TWO

• The second experiment was very similar to the first. 48 new boys were used as subjects and all the subjects knew each other well.

• The experiment differed in two ways.

• The boys were shown slides of paintings by Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, which were shown without the painter’s signature and were asked to express their preferences.
EXPERIMENT TWO

• Half of the subjects were assigned at random to the ‘Klee group’ and half to the ‘Kandinsky group’.

• The other major difference was in the type of matrices used. In this experiment matrices were employed which allowed the experimenters to investigate three variables. The three variables were:
EXPERIMENT TWO

1. *maximum joint profit* - where boys could give the largest reward to members of both groups;
2. *largest possible reward to in-group* - where the boys could choose the largest reward for the member of their own group regardless of the reward to the boy from the other group;
3. *maximum difference* - where boys could choose the largest possible difference in reward between members of the different groups (in favor of the in-group)
**EXPERIMENT TWO**

- If we look at an example below of one of the matrices we can see how the three variables can be measured

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boy No. 1 In-group</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy No. 2 Out-group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXPERIMENT TWO

• *Maximum joint profit* and *giving the largest reward to the in-group* would both be achieved by choosing the last pair in the row, giving 19 to a member of your own group, and 25 to a member of the other group.
The experiments carried out by Tajfel clearly demonstrate that inter-group discrimination is easy to trigger off. Tajfel demonstrates that the very act of categorization into groups is enough to produce conflict and discrimination.

In making their intergroup choices a large majority of the subjects, in all groups in both conditions, gave more money to members of their own group than to members of the other group. Intergroup discrimination was the strategy used in making intergroup choices.
RESULTS/FINDINGS

• In contrast the in-group and out-group choices were closely distributed around the point of fairness.

• The second experiment also clearly demonstrated that the most important factor in making their choices was maximising the differences between the two groups.
A major strength of the procedure was the high level of control Tajfel managed to employ. For example, there was no face-to-face interaction between group members; the boys only knew of other in-group/out-group members by a code number; although the boys did not realize this, they were in fact assigned randomly to the two groups; the boys could only award points to others (either in-groupers or out-groupers) and never to themselves and that they could not know what others would do or in any way influence how others behaved.
WEAKNESSES

• Tajfel’s experiment has been criticized because it is very artificial (not ecologically valid). Would the simple act of categorisation be sufficient to create discrimination in a more ecologically valid situation? In everyday life categorization does often come with some degree of competition.

• Importantly Tajfel’s experiment has also been criticized because it contains demand characteristics. The experiment aimed to demonstrate that competition was not a sufficient factor in the creation of intergroup discrimination. Tajfel demonstrated that merely categorizing people into in-groups and out-groups is sufficient to create intergroup discrimination. However it has been suggested that if schoolboys are divided into groups, by adults, they will automatically interpret these groups as ‘teams’ and think in terms of competition.
WEAKNESSES

• Tajfel has also been criticized for the way he interpreted his results. Brown (1988), for example, suggests that the behavior of the boys can be seen in terms of fairness as much as discrimination. Although the boys showed bias towards their own group, this bias was not very extreme and seemed to be moderated by a sense of fairness.
In a later study Tajfel uses Social Identity Theory (SIT) as an explanation for intergroup discrimination. Social identity theory argues that the boys favoured their own group because it increases their self-esteem. Even though the boys were never giving points to themselves they knew that if they gave less to the other group and more to their own group that they would be in the group which gained most points therefore improving their self-esteem because they belonged to the ‘best’ group.
Tajfel's social identity theory has become one of the main theories in European social psychology. The theory is useful because as well as explaining the social causes of prejudice it may also be able to explain individual differences, i.e. why some people are more likely to discriminate than others. Some individuals, for example, may be more prone to prejudice because they have an intense need for acceptance by others. For such individuals, personal and social identity may be much more interlinked than for those with a lesser need for social acceptance. This need for a sense of security and superiority can be met by belonging to a favoured in-group and showing hostility towards out-groups.
• It is possible to criticise Tajfel's Social Identity Theory. Tajfel maintained that competition was not a sufficient factor in the creation of intergroup discrimination. Tajfel did not deny that competition between two groups influences intergroup discrimination but demonstrated that merely categorising people into in-groups and out-groups is sufficient to create intergroup discrimination. Similar findings have been replicated using a wide range of subjects in a wide range of cultures.
However, many psychologists have demonstrated that conflict is not inevitable. In cultures which do not emphasise competition, as much as perhaps the West does, categorisation does not always seem to lead to discrimination.

This is not to say that Social Identity Theory does not work but suggests that within societies which emphasise co-operation and fairness intergroup discrimination will be less likely to happen.