



Research on the Effect of Social Contact on Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination

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Abstract. The use of social contact to mitigate prejudice and discrimination was studied by many psychologists since Allport proposed the contact hypothesis. Discrimination and prejudice are a very common phenomena that confront groups of people who may come from different races, nationalities, and beliefs. Nonetheless, it is important to take it seriously, as the damage caused by discrimination and prejudice is endless. This paper examines the relationship between social contact and prejudice and discrimination through literature analysis and theory, concluding that social contact mitigates prejudice and discrimination, even if only in behavioral terms.

Keywords: Prejudice, discrimination, contact hypothesis, social contact, peace theory

1 Introduction

People are not born with prejudice; it is more a product of acquired formation. Gordon w. Allport defines prejudice as an attitude or feeling of hostility towards a person simply because he or she belongs to a group. By its very essence, it leads a person to make rash and decisive judgements before they are known, judgements that reject the facts and ignore the truths. Although prejudice in everyday life is usually personal in nature, it is sometimes directed at a group of people who share the same characteristics (e.g. religion, race, nationality, etc.) and is therefore based on unrealistic generalisations and stereotypes. Discrimination is defined as a mixture of behaviours, practices and policies that are based on the (perceived) social group of which the discriminated person is a member and the group in question must be socially salient [1]. Acts of such discrimination can include various aspects such as verbal violence and verbal abuse; physical harm such as being kicked or hit; and can even exist in the form of rumours via the internet.

This kind of discrimination is very common. Non-acceptance and non-recognition in the workplace in relation to gender and disability [2]; discrimination and devaluation of sexual minorities in the workplace [3]; differences in taxi fares in Ghana [4] and attitudes towards granting citizenship to migrants in Switzerland [5] clearly show that

prejudice and discrimination against different groups is a socially pervasive phenomenon. In conflict and post-conflict hell, inter-ethnic discrimination is very visible and unconcealed, such as the historical discrimination between Christian and Muslim communities in the Aguskalk, and the less generous treatment of members of extra-ethnic groups in the Balkans [6].

However, despite the frequent occurrence of discrimination and prejudice between inter-group and our-group, in practice a very clear and specific solution on the question is still in progress "What interventions have been shown to reduce prejudice and conflict in real-world settings? prejudice and conflict in real-world settings?" [5]. Among these are theories that have also been tested experimentally and thus applied to many conflict and post-conflict settings as the scope of interventions page has expanded from reducing prejudice to improving intergroup relations and promoting reconciliation more generally, like the contact hypothesis. The premise of the contact hypothesis was developed by [7], who argued that under certain conditions, contact with people from disliked groups would lead to an increase in liking and respect, or at least a reduction in prejudice against outgroups. In Allport's case, he argues that research on prejudice related prevention measures is necessary because of the high risk of prejudicial behaviour [8]. His research demonstrates that prejudice can lead to a variety of harmful behaviors, such as outgroup avoidance, discrimination, and personal attacks across groups. This framework has been utilized for more than 60 years to show how social interaction can promote equality and social cohesiveness [7] [9]. Additionally effective at directing treatments to lessen prejudice against minority groups [10].

These efforts are much needed, as research into the relationship between contacts, discrimination and conflict can have very far-reaching implications for policy as well as for the populations affected. From Alport onwards, practitioners have tried many times on using positive types of social contact to strengthen intergroup interactions. In the last two decades, grassroots peacebuilding initiatives have proliferated rapidly in conflict settings among the world. These interventions include, but are not limited to, Christian-Muslim integration basketball unions in Nigeria; the decision to evenly distribute ethnic nationalities to each university dormitory (as opposed to apartheid); mixed Jewish and Arab tango courses in Israel, and so on. These interventions were all driven by the premise that peace and stability at the macro level could be built from scratch [11].

This paper will based on the contact hypothesis and examines the effect of positive social contact on reducing prejudice and discrimination among members of opposing groups through the use of past papers.

The contact hypothesis, also known as intergroup contact theory, went through a period of theoretical gestation before being alport (1954). Twentieth-century theorists of thought were not optimistic about this, with a large proportion believing that contact would instead exacerbate "suspicion, fear, resentment, disturbance and at times open conflict." [12] Especially in the post-World War II era - a time of heightened racial tensions. At the outset enlightenment research on intergroup contact was very uneventful. The results of the experiment showed that when Northern students went to study at Southern universities, their anti-black attitudes grew instead [13]. Subsequent reflection

on the experiment attributed the bias in the results to the fact that the rest of the university staff was white and the students were only exposed to blacks of lower status and cultural sophistication. Later studies investigated the effect of more favourable conditions of black-white contact on prejudice, and the general result obtained was that the more positive the racial attitudes of the blacks-whites who worked with each other after partnering [5]. In a review of research on intergroup contact, Robbin Williams emphasized that: a) contact is substantially less prejudicial when two people have similar status interests b) the situation promotes intimate intergroup contact between individuals c) participants do not conform to stereotypical notions of their group d) the activity itself crosses group boundaries. The reports of these studies and the notions of Robbin Williams largely inform and contextualise Allport's ideas. He also notes the contrasting effects of intergroup contact - that is, contact that reduces prejudice in most cases but can also be counterproductive in others - and to account for these inconsistencies, Allport opts for a 'positive factor' approach, i.e. when the situation satisfies Contact reduces prejudice when four positive characteristics are met: a) equal status between groups; b) common goals; c) cooperative relationships and d) support of local legal practices.

The contact hypothesis and the positive factor approach proposed by Allport have largely opened the minds of subsequent theorists and psychologists, however, recent developments by subsequent researchers have confirmed their non-necessity with regard to the 'positive factor'. A meta-analysis of 515 studies with over 250,000 subjects [14] suggests that intergroup contact generally reduces prejudice. All the initial conditions for optimal contact - equal status, common goals, absence of intergroup competition and authority sanctions - contribute to this effect, but are not essential. At the same time, despite the number of experiments confirming the correct conclusion of this hypothesis, there are still a number of potential problems to be faced. The first is the problem of selection, i.e. prejudiced people may deliberately avoid contact with members of their social group; secondly, the observational method usually used by researchers to observe the comparison of attitudes before and after contact, as well as the questionnaire method, can easily be biased, due to the researcher's self-consciousness about the purpose of the study and the participants' expectation of the results; the third point concerns the applicability to the external environment. Occurrences of intergroup violence may exacerbate identify disintegration and bolster prejudice against outgroups [15]. Persistent violence can generate stiffer barriers among ethnic groups [16] and can cause people to dislike physical closeness with members of different ethnic groups [17].

2 Mainbody

2.1 Living environment

Using the conditions of everyday life environments to socialize contact to achieve a reduction in prejudice and discrimination was tested by SCACCO, A. and WARREN, S. (2018) In this randomized field experiment conducted in northern Nigeria, they assigned Christian and Muslim young men to different teams to complete the project. After six weeks of positive social contact, the results showed found that they found that

social contact led to less prejudice and discrimination, at least in terms of behaviour. This indirectly validates that the positive factors proposed by Allport (i.e. equal status between groups; cooperative relationships and common goals) are effective in reducing discrimination. It may also be proved that this contextual similarity between socially significant groups, such as religious groups in northern Nigeria, amplifies the effect of social contact significantly. According to the contact hypothesis, in-group contact is accomplished through the formation of intergroup relationships. In-group social interaction would operate in the same manner, and be much more productive. In a homogeneous setting, in-group members have numerous benefits when it comes to contact interventions, such as similar norms of reciprocity, culture, and languages - what Habyarimana et al. (2007) refer to as the advantageous "technology" of shared ethnicity. Whites at university who have the opportunity to share a dorm with Blacks and have more frequent personal contact reduce their original prejudice and rejection of sharing a dorm with Blacks the following semester [18]. Lori Beaman et al., in their study of prejudice and discrimination, they found that personal, social contact with female leaders enhances perceptions of female leaders' effectiveness and diminishes stereotypes about women's roles in the public and domestic spheres. There was also a direct correlation with less bias against female supervisors - a 50%-100% decrease in bias based on the measures they used. These other findings are consistent with previous research and claims that social contact in everyday life situations leads to less prejudice and stereotyping [19].

2.2 Mass media

Various stereotypes about minorities, such as gays and lesbians [20], African Americans, and Asians, have been proven to be perpetuated by the mainstream media in the majority of Western countries [5]. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Ahmed and Matthes (2017) note that there has been an upsurge in anti-Muslim discourse in the mass media in many Western nations and a rise in negative portrayals of the Muslim minority [21]. These media outlets are very vocal, so if they make inappropriate statements they can be most directly misleading to the people. This misrepresentation is mainly due to the fact that most people do not have any social connection to other ethnic groups and the mass media is the main source of getting information judgement about other ethnic groups or races [7], so if the mass media takes an unbiased stance, the public's impression of what is being portrayed will gradually deviate from the truth and eventually form stereotypes, stereotypes and even prejudices.

Because of the enormous influence of the media, psychologists believe that its ability to shape the attitudes of the majority through the portrayal of minority groups is well worth developing. This topic has been well researched through framing [22] [23]. Framing refers to the construction of issues through the choice and salience of language. It is often used to look at the role of the mass media in the creation and transmission of ideologies in society [7]. The central assumption of framing studies is that when citizens are unable to observe real-world events for themselves, they adopt media-constructed frames to interpret reality [24]. This feature leads to the idea that the media can influence audiences' perceptions of a minority group by framing that group's issues. Also,

cultivation theory suggests that mass media provides its consumers with a constant set of homogenised messages that shape their perceptions of the world through time and repeated exposure. These messages have the same system and the same themes and have a consistent meaning. Repeated exposure to these themes can lead viewers to believe that what is portrayed in the mass media is reality [7]. By using these two concepts, scholars have been able to establish a connection between the mass media and the audience, with the intention of ameliorating prejudice and discrimination between opposing groups. This has proven to be effective.

In an experiment by Bilali, R., and Staub, E. (2017), by exploiting the frequent contact of soap operas with adolescents in the Burundi region, they changed the plot of the soap opera slightly in order to disseminate information about the history and characteristics of the dyadic group. The results are consistent with Paluck's research in Rwanda [5], i.e. the 'virtual' contact of the audience with the antagonistic group in the soap opera led to a positive change in the attitude of the outgroup towards the discriminated group. At the same time soap opera listeners are more willing than non-listeners to acknowledge that discrimination against the opposite group is a form of disguised violence, and they are also more willing to tolerate the outgroup and try to make social contact with the out group.

The positive impact of soap operas on outgroup trust and social distance. Furthermore, soap opera listeners are more likely than non-listeners to acknowledge in-group responsibility for violence and they are less likely to blame the out-group. Similar results have been shown in other studies [5], namely that through virtual contact with opposing groups in radio dramas, audiences generally have higher levels of inclusivity and less exclusivity, as well as greater tolerance of cross-group marriages. Soap operas developed for mass media audiences based on the concepts of framing and cultivation theory have gone a long way towards reducing tensions between opposing groups and reducing prejudice and discrimination.

2.3 Sports

As sports have a wider audience, various international actors, particularly the United Nations, international development agencies, FIFA and the International Olympic Committee, are promoting the use of sport to achieve social change. They have combined with other agencies to create a strategy known as Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), which aims to support the role of sport in promoting human peace and reducing struggle and mutual discrimination. Sport for development and peace is a relatively new strategy for social intervention and an emerging interdisciplinary field of study. However, despite the growing literature on sport for development, academics still highlight the lack of research that analyses sport and peace in terms of their interaction. Although there has been a significant amount of research into the role of SDP projects, Sugden and Haasner (2009) argue that only a few discussions and studies have been based on conflict resolution theory. The limited research that has used sport for conflict resolution [11] has utilised peace theory, including Galtung's 3rs (1998), Lederach's network approach to peacemaking (2005) and Schirch's ritual use (2005), and these experiments have concluded that 1) Spectator/participant bonding can be

achieved through peaceful sport projects, thus facilitating relationship building and promoting social inclusion [11]. At the same time, sport helps to create a more positive environment - by helping people to regain a sense of security and normality [25]. Peace sports can teach members how to resolve conflicts through the feature of team sports. For example, the Football for Peace (F4P)³ organisation, Sport has been used by an organization with initiatives in Israel, Jordan, and Northern Ireland to promote social contact across communities and educate participants about peaceful cooperation and conflict resolution [26]. Another example of the use of sport to reduce prejudice and discrimination through social contact comes from Gasser and Levinsen (2004), who found that by opening up fun sports programmes in schools, it was possible to achieve more peaceful development and less hostility between formerly rival communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, research has shown that grassroots youth football programmes have brought tens of thousands of children from formerly rival communities together to play football since 1998 [27].

3 Conclusion

This paper analysed the effect of social contact on reducing discrimination and prejudice in three areas: everyday environment, mass media and sport. It concluded that positive social contact generally leads to a reduction in prejudice and discrimination among opposing groups.

However, the results of the existing studies are still one-sided and their applicability to conflict situations needs to be questioned. According to experimental results, intergroup violence may increase the salience of identity fragmentation and reinforce prejudice against outgroups. Sustained violence can produce stricter boundaries between ethnic groups and can lead individuals to fear physical proximity to members of other ethnic groups. One issue to consider, therefore, is that in reality there is no 'perfect environment' as suggested by the research. Indeed, the hostility between races cannot be ignored, and it is questionable whether they would be willing to work with each other in spite of their deep prejudices.

It is also for this reason that prejudice and discrimination itself affects many relationships that could otherwise develop well, because to some extent attitudes directly affect interests and choices. Allport (1954) himself stresses that "as a rule, discrimination has more immediate and serious social consequences than prejudice. Likewise, in an analysis of relevant literature on discrimination and prejudice, Fiske (2000) acknowledges the dearth of research on prejudicial behavior in social psychology and calls for additional study in this field. The author has identified several important political implications from the past literature. First, the project effect is an important driver of increased outgroup generosity. Educational content and economic development projects can be combined with intergroup linkages so that simply providing disadvantaged youth with educational and economic empowerment opportunities may induce them to feel good about outgroup members and society at large. Secondly, setting goals to alter behavior, as opposed to reducing bias, may be more achievable and beneficial in the long-term. Although attitude change is more likely to occur in teenagers and young

adults [5], it is perhaps not surprising that bias is resistant to change in a setting where conflict is frequently experienced. Over a decade of memories, prejudices are established and reinforced.

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