New directions in research on well-being: psychological process in everyday contexts

Irene Petruccelli

Rome, May 5th, 2020
Stereotypes & Prejudice

Definition:

Prejudice:
a negative attitude toward a group or toward members of the group.

Defining stereotyping process has been more problematic... there are many definitions in the literature, mostly based on the general idea of stereotypes as knowledge structures that serve as mental “pictures” of the groups in question (Lippmann, 1922).
Stereotypes represent the traits that we view as characteristic of social groups, or of individual members of those groups, and particularly those that differentiate groups from each other.

In short, they are the traits that come to mind quickly when we think about the groups.
Characteristics of **stereotypes** and **prejudice** (Allport, 1954):

- **inaccuracy**,  
- **negativity**,  
- **overgeneralization**.

Although they can be positive, **stereotypes** are primarily negative.

- Let’s try to make an example of a positive stereotype....
• The problem, in part, is that if we express positive stereotypes, it is assumed that we hold the negative ones, too!

• The process of using stereotypes (overgeneralization) is problematic, because it is so unfair (Fiske, 1989; Stangor, 1995).

• No matter how accurate our belief is, it does not describe every member of the group—therefore, basing judgments of individuals on category level knowledge is just plain wrong.

• **Categorization** is less fair than **individuation**!
Walter Lippmann: Public Opinion, “The Pictures inside our Heads” and Stereotypes

- Walter Lippmann was a key figure in the shaping and studying of Public Opinion in the 20th century.

Context:
- Propaganda in World War I
- 20th century American society: mass communication, mass society, capitalism...
video

• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRjejSLI78Y
What Propaganda is:

• Is a type of non-objective communication.

• Is the political communication method most used by totalitarianism regimes.

• Flock effect: masses become irrational.
Propaganda

Typologies:

- It pictures America as an already winning force with a technique called “Inevitable victory”.
- Tries to persuade the public to follow a certain line because “everyone is doing that”, “join the mass”.
- This technique: brings out even more the desire of people to stay on the winning side.
- It invites the one that are not in the flock yet to join the ones that will for sure win; reassures the one that already inside to stay because is the best thing to do.
The role of the leader:

The crowd, to be influenced, must receive a message from the leader with well-defined characteristics:

• **Affirmation**: the message must be impressionistic and authoritarian, because it has no objective evidence to support it;

• **Repetition**: it is the power of propaganda, of effect sentences, of "Make America great again" or of the word "invasion" to describe migratory phenomena;

• **Contagion**: the message must be simple and direct enough to be able to spread rapidly and standardize the opinions of the crowd.
Propaganda techniques (1/2):

- **Intentional Vagueness**: the generalizations are always generic, in a way that the public can have their own interpretation. The intention is to convince the public through the use on undefined phrases, without analyzing their validity or tempting to determine their applicability or reason.

- **Obtaining Disapproval**: this technique is used to bring the public to disapprove and action or idea suggesting that this is popular in groups that are hated or feared.

- **Oversimplification**: favorable generalizations are utilized to provide simple answers to complex social problems, politics, economics or military.
Propaganda techniques (2/2):

- **Glittenring Banalities**: these are words with an intense emotional charge, associated to concept of high value, that brings belief without supporting information or reasoning. The words and the phrases are vague and suggest different things to different people: the concepts and programs of the propagandists are always good, desirable and virtuous.

- **Witness**: they are quote, inside or outside the context, said specifically to support or deny one political action, program or personality. The testimony places the official sanction of a respected person or authority on the propaganda message.

- **Transfer**: this is a technique of projection of positive or negative qualities of a person, entity or value to another subject to make this person more acceptable or to discredit him. It is often used to transfer the blame from an actor to another. It evokes an emotional answer that stimulates the public to identify with the recognized authority.
Lippmann

- Lippmann tried to explain how the pictures that arise *spontaneously* in people’s minds *come to be*—a simplification of his theory is that we live in second-hand worlds. Because we are aware of much more than we have *personally* experienced our own experience is mainly indirect.

- Lippmann felt that the only feeling that anyone can have about an event, that they did not experience, is the feeling aroused by their *mental image* of that event.

**Pictures inside out heads**

- Discrepancy between the world and the “realities’ we perceive and act upon;
- Most of what we know of the environment we live in comes to us indirectly, but “whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself”
• «The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event»
• We often respond as powerfully to fictions as to realities, and often we help create those fictions.

• In every case, there has been inserted between us and the environment a pseudoenvironment, and it is to this pseudoenvironment that we respond.

• Propaganda, is an effort to alter the pictures to which we respond.
Lippmann’s conclusion about democratic government in 20th century mass society

- In *Public Opinion* (1922), Lippmann compared the masses to a “great beast” and a “bewildered herd” that needed to be guided by a governing class.

*Phantom Public* (1925)

"The individual man does not have opinions on public affairs... I cannot imagine how he could know, and there is not the least reason for thinking, as mystical democrats have thought, that the compounding of individual ignorances in masses of people can produce a continuous directing force in public affairs"
Lippmann and Stereotypes

- Lippmann presented “stereotypes” as a characteristic element of human perception. He argued that they were essential in the modern world because the global reach of contemporary society, made it impossible for people to make sense of the world on the basis of first-hand knowledge.
Where stereotypes come from

- For Lippmann, the stereotypes did not come from the individual. For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see.
- We pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.
- Media trades in stereotypes
- Characteristic of modern mass societies in contrast to the more closed societies before the mass communications revolution
Video

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-t77-Zr8po
Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

- **Stereotype**
  - Belief that certain attributes are characteristic of members of particular groups
- **Cognition**
- **Prejudice**
  - A negative (or positive) attitude toward a certain group that is applied to its individual members
- **Emotion**
- **Discrimination**
  - Unfair treatment of members of a particular group based on their membership in that group
- **Behavior**
One of the most important contributions for the reduction of prejudice between groups is Gordon Allport's hypothesis or theory of contact (1954), according to which the simple interaction between people belonging to different groups, under the appropriate conditions, reduces ethnic prejudice and the tension between the groups.
Gordon Allport - Contact Theory

- Although this idea was the basis of the United States' racial desegregation policies of the 1960s, several authors, including Allport (1954), agree that mere contact does not guarantee agreement between groups and the decrease injury: the decisive element must be a common purpose on the horizon that leads to cooperation.
The intergroup contact hypothesis proposed by Allport (1954) suggested that positive effects of intergroup contact occur in contact situations characterized by 4 key conditions:

1. equal status,
2. intergroup cooperation,
3. common goals, and
4. support by social and institutional authorities.

According to Allport, it is essential that the contact situation exhibits these factors to some degree. Indeed, these factors do appear to be important in reducing prejudice, as exemplified by the unique importance of cross-group friendships in reducing prejudice.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal Status</td>
<td>Members of the contact situation should not have an unequal, hierarchical relationship.</td>
<td>Members should not have an employer/employee, or instructor/student relationship.</td>
<td>Evidence has documented that equal status is important both prior to (Brewer &amp; Kramer, 1985) and during (Cohen &amp; Lotan, 1995) the contact situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Members should work together in a non-competitive environment.</td>
<td>Students working together in a group project.</td>
<td>Aronson’s ‘jigsaw technique’ structures classrooms so that students strive cooperatively (Aronson &amp; Patnoe, 1967), and this technique has led to positive results in a variety of countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Goals</td>
<td>Members must rely on each other to achieve their shared desired goal.</td>
<td>Members of a sports team.</td>
<td>Hu and Griffey (1985) have shown the importance of common goals in interracial athletic teams who need to work together to achieve their goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support by Social and</td>
<td>There should not be social or institutional authorities that explicitly or implicitly sanction contact, and there should be authorities that support positive contact.</td>
<td>There should not be official laws enforcing segregation.</td>
<td>Landis’ (1984) work on the importance of institutional support in reducing prejudice in the military.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive contact experiences have been shown to reduce self-reported *prejudice* (the most common way of assessing intergroup attitudes) towards Black neighbors, the elderly, gay men, and the disabled - to name just a few.

While contact under Allport’s conditions is especially effective at reducing *prejudice*, even unstructured contact reduces *prejudice*.

What this means is that Allport’s proposed conditions should be best be seen as of a facilitating, rather than an essential, nature.

This is important as it serves to show the importance of the *contact hypothesis*. Contact between groups, even in sub-optimal conditions, is strongly associated with reduced *prejudice*. 
Video:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mGxJkFVQpI
How does it work?

Multiple mechanisms have been proposed to explain just how contact reduces prejudice.

“4 processes of change” have been proposed:

- learning about the out-group,
- changing behavior,
- generating affective ties,
- in-group reappraisal.
Contact can, and does, work through both:

- **cognitive** (i.e. learning about the *out-group*),
- **behavioural** (changing one’s behavior to open oneself to potential positive contact experiences),
- and **affective** (generating affective ties and friendships, and reducing negative emotions) means.

A particularly important mediating mechanism is that of emotions, or affect, with evidence suggesting that contact works to reduce *prejudice* by diminishing negative affect (anxiety / threat) and inducing positive affect such as *empathy*. 
Contact situations which promote positive affect and reduce negative affect are most likely to succeed in conflict reduction.

Contact situations are likely to be effective at improving intergroup relations insofar as they induce positive affect, and ineffective insofar as they induce negative affect such as anxiety or threat.

If we feel comfortable and not anxious, the contact situation will be much more successful.
How these positive experiences after contact can be extended and generalized to other members of the outgroup?

• While contact may reduce an individual’s prejudice towards (for example) their Muslim colleague, its practical use is strongly limited if it doesn’t also diminish prejudice towards other Muslims.

• Contact with each and every member of an outgroup – let alone of all out-groups to which prejudice is directed – is clearly unfeasible and so a crucial question in intergroup contact research is how the positive effect can be generalized.
Pettigrew (1998) proposed a 3 stage model to take place over time to optimize successful contact and generalization:

1. the decategorization stage, where participants’ personal (and not group) identities should be emphasized to reduce anxiety and promote interpersonal liking.

2. the individuals’ social categories should be made salient to achieve generalization of positive affect to the outgroup as a whole.

3. the recategorization stage, where participants’ group identities are replaced with a more superordinate group: changing group identities from ‘Us vs. Them’ to a more inclusive ‘We’.

This stage model could provide an effective method of generalizing the positive effects of intergroup contact.
Recent work on the role of intergroup contact in reducing *prejudice* has moved away from the idea that contact must necessarily include direct (face-to-face) contact between group members and instead includes the notion that *indirect contact* (e.g. imagined contact, or knowledge of contact among others) may also have a beneficial effect.

Mere knowledge that an *ingroup* member has a close relationship with an *outgroup* member can improve *outgroup* attitudes, and indeed this has been supported by a series of experimental and correlational studies.
For example, just watching TV shows that portrayed intergroup contact was associated with lower levels of *prejudice*.

A second example of an indirect approach to contact comes from Crisp and Turner’s (2009) imagined *contact hypothesis*, which suggests that actual experiences may not be necessary to improve intergroup attitudes, and that simply *imagining* contact with *outgroup* members could improve *outgroup* attitudes.
These more recent extensions of the *contact hypothesis* have offered important suggestions on how to most effectively generalize the benefits of the contact situation and make use of findings from work on mediating mechanisms.

It seems that direct face-to-face contact is always not necessary, and that positive outcomes can be achieved by positive presentation of intergroup-friendships in the media and even simply by imagining interacting with an *outgroup* member.
One promising suggestion is to emphasize commonalities between groups while also addressing unjust group inequalities during the contact situation.

Such a contact situation could result in prejudice reduction without losing sight of group inequality (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009). Contact, then, has been shown to be of utmost importance in reduction of prejudice and promotion of more positive intergroup attitudes. Such research has important implications for policy work.

Work on contact highlights the importance of institutional support and advocacy of more positive intergroup relations, the importance of equal status between groups, the importance of cooperation between groups and the importance of positive media presentations of intergroup friendships.
“Theory-driven social psychology does matter, not just in the laboratory, but also in the school, the neighborhood, and the society at large”

(Hewstone & Swart, 2011. p. 380)


