Toward a Sociological Approach to Prejudice: An Appraisal of Theories Which Attribute Prejudice to Personality Variables

Leonard Weller
University of Connecticut, Storrs

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The sociology of prejudice attempts to explain certain types of tensions and contests between individuals and social groups. Prejudice occupies so vital an area of social life that there has been no lack of theories. The great majority of these theories of prejudice attribute the phenomena to personality variables. The present paper examines the adequacy of this theoretical orientation and suggests a sociological approach to the area of minority group relations.

Types of Theories which Attribute Prejudice to Personality Variables: The many theories which attribute prejudice to personality variables fall into a number of distinct sub-types: Authoritarian Personality, Frustration-Aggression, and Anomic Theory. The first of these sub-theories attributes prejudice to a particular type of personality, the others to distinctive conditions or states of individual personalities. These sub-theories are reviewed in order.

The Authoritarian Personality (Adorno, 1950) is perhaps the foremost attempt to account for prejudice on the basis of personality.[2] Originally the authors oriented their inquiry to the potentially anti-Semitic person. Why, they asked, do some people become anti-Semitic while others do not? Two broad hypotheses guided their research: (1) anti-Semitism is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a broader ideological orientation, and (2) an individual's receptivity to this ideology depends on his psychological needs or personality requirements. Psychoanalytic theory supplied the writers' account of personality formation.

The major portion of the Adorno study was devoted to the isolation of the type of personality hypothesized to lead one to engage in prejudiced behavior. After extensive research,[3] nine variables were derived. Individuals possessing many of these qualities were characterized as Authoritarian Personalities. These variables are listed below, together with a brief definition of each (Adorno, 1950:248-250):

1. CONVENTIONALISM: Rigid adherence to conventional, middle-class values.

2. AUTHORITARIAN SUBMISSION: Submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the ingroup.

3. AUTHORITARIAN AGGRESSION: Tendency to be on the lookout for, and to condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional values.

4. ANTI-INTRACEPTION: Opposition to the subjective, the imaginative, the tender-minded.

5. SUPERSTITION AND STEREOTYPE: The belief in mystical determinants of the individual's fate; the disposition to think in rigid categories.

6. POWER AND "TOUGHNESS": Preoccupation with the dominance-submission, strong-weak, leader-follower dimension; identification with power figures; over-emphasis on the conventionalized attitudes of the ego; exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness.

7. DESTRUCTIVENESS AND CYNICISM: Generalized hostility, vilification of the human.

8. PROJECTIVITY: The disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outward of unconscious emotional impulses.

9. SEX: Exaggerated concern with sexual "goings-on."

Since the minority group was not the cause of prejudice, it seemed reasonable to assume that the prejudiced person would act similarly toward any outside group. An Ethnocentrism Scale composed of three subscales, attitudes toward Negroes, Minorities (excluding Jews) and extreme Patriotism, was developed and found to correlate .80 with the original anti-Semitism scale. This high correlation was interpreted as substantiating a *general* ethnocentrism or outgroup rejection. Subsequently, the Ethnocentrism Scale was revised to include statements about Jews.

The study thus sought to verify the hypothesis that anti-Semitism is closely connected with ethnocentrism, that is, a dislike of all minority and outgroups. The existence of the personality syndrome, called the Authoritarian Personality, was demonstrated to correlate highly

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[2] Indicative of this is the publication of *Studies in the Scope and Method of the Authoritarian Personality* (Christie and Jahoda, 1954), a book solely devoted to the criticism, evaluation, and development of the *Authoritarian Personality*. By 1956 the literature had grown so extensive that a published bibliography contained 230 references (Christie and Cook, 1958).

[3] Space limits discussion of the elaborate methodology employed. Suffice it to say that it included four attitude scales measuring Anti-Semitism, Political-Economic Conservatism, Ethnocentrism (a more generalized prejudice), and the Authoritarian Personality; interviews obtaining information about the respondent's past and present situation, feelings, fears, and wishes, with special reference to parents, siblings, friends, sex relationships, and conception of the childhood environment; use of the Thematic Apperception Test.

with anti-Semitism and a more general prejudice, ethnocentrism. On Freudian grounds, the family was conceived to be the major determinant of this personality syndrome, which was seen to be related to the way one viewed himself and others, as well as the manner by which appropriate and congruent ideologies were selected.

According to the second, the Frustration-Aggression theory, aggression is always the consequence of frustration.[4] Frustration is that condition which exists when a goal response suffers interference. The amount of aggression, the response to blocked goal responses, depends on the strength of motivation, kinds and the number of interferences.

Of particular importance for the theory of prejudice is displaced aggression. Knowledge that punishment may ensue as a result of aggression may inhibit such behavior, as, for example, when an employee refrains from telling his employer what he really thinks of him. However, the frustration engendered by the inability to attack the source of discomfort may be released against a surrogate. Prejudice is such a surrogate. The theory as it stands is deficient. Aggression is not an inevitable consequence of frustration, but only one alternative response. Other reactions include regression, repression, and withdrawal. We do not all respond in a similar manner; acts which provoke some individuals to aggression may affect others differently. Moreover, individuals differ not only in their reactions to frustration, but also in their tolerance thresholds. Some losses involve a threat to the personality, while others just result in not obtaining the desired object.

In terms of these criticisms, we can recast the original hypothesis: (1) One of the consequences of frustration, which varies with the definition of the situation, is aggression. The individual's past history plays a significant role not only in defining the situation, but also in the degree of frustration tolerance. (2) Aggression may be direct or displaced. The possibility of punishment is the critical factor in determining whether an aggressive response will be the dominant one, and if so, whether it will be focused on the original source or on the surrogate.

Both explicitly and implicitly, the frustration-aggression hypothesis has been used to explain group aggression. Whether it be group or individual aggression, the cause of the displacement is interpreted as due to repressed hostility, or frustration. Thus, the requirements of socialization or tensions of daily living cause continuous frustration. Moreover, at special periods of the life cycle, for example, the adolescent period, frustration increases. Frustration is also increased by social conditions, such as economic depressions. Whatever the cause, runs

[4]This presentation follows the formulation in *Frustration and Aggression* (Dollard, 1939) although the behavioristic terminology has been omitted. It is recognized that this idea is not new and that it has been in the literature in one form or another for many years. Freud is the most immediate precursor of this hypothesis; of special note is his discussion in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939).

the theory, minority groups are outlets for these frustrations.

The anomic theory of prejudice represents an extension of the idea of "anomie" as formulated by Durkheim. The concept refers to a condition of normlessness — lack of or uncertainty about the rules in a society or group. Anomie is usually conceived of as a property of the social order, and not of individuals. However, social-psychologists and psychologists located this "uncertainty" in the individual. Anomie taken as a condition of the actor has been used to explain individual behavior.

MacIver's presentation of anomie may be regarded as typical. For MacIver, anomie is a state of mind of an individual. The anomic individual is —

. . . one who has been pulled up by his moral roots, who has no longer any standards but only disconnected urges, who has no longer any sense of continuity, of folk, of obligation.

Anomy is the state of mind in which the individual's sense of social cohesion — the mainspring of his morale — is broken or fatally weakened. In this detachment of the anomic person from social obligation his whole personality is injured. He has lost the *dynamic unity* of personality. (MacIver, 1950:84-85)

The essence of anomie is the breakdown of the individual's sense of attachment to society. The anomic individual is neither healthy nor adjusted. He is isolated, insecure, undirected, and purposeless. His integrity — his feeling of "I" — is weakened.

The anomic personality has an excessive need for belonging. This isolation, this feeling of separation from the group, may be mitigated by prejudiced behavior. Being insecure, he may seek the feeling of identification by identifying with the majority group and thereby reaffirm his feeling of the place in the society in which he lives.

One way in which such a person expresses his identification is by attacking those who do not belong to the majority. The more insecure, the more strongly he may be motivated to assert identification with the majority. Similar, perhaps, is the low status individual who strives to gain status by identifying with the larger American Society. He, too, may express these feelings in scorn of groups which seem inferior to him.

Being uncertain about the tradition, norms and rules of the society, the anomic individual desires reassurance that the old norms are correct and valid. He can look for such reassurance from the established leaders of the community, turn to new leaders who promise salvation, or rigidly adhere to selected parts of the culture. If the leaders advocate prejudiced behavior, the anomic individual follows uncritically. Related to the need for certainty is the anomic individual's need for an explanation of the present circumstances. Especially if there is a prior tradition of prejudice in the community, the minority group may be seen as the cause of the current uncertainty.

There are a number of other "individualistic" theories of prejudice, some of which are deeply rooted in psychoanalytical theory, while others are based on general personality theory. The three theories here discussed, as well

as other variants, can be logically grouped together. Individual theories of prejudice locate the sources of discrimination in the individual personality. Prejudiced behavior is conceived as a result of the *needs* of individual personalities. In this sense, prejudice resides "in" the personality; individuals behave in this manner because they are psychologically motivated or compelled to.

The three current individualistic theories of prejudice agree as to the nature of prejudice, but differ as to details, such as *which* needs are thwarted. The Authoritarian Personality emphasizes frustration arising out of early childhood experiences; the Frustration-Aggression theory asserts the relevance of any frustrated drive; the Anomic theory stresses a frustrating effect of certain conditions of the social order upon personality.

Critical Difficulties with the Theory that Prejudice is due to Personality Variables: The discussion in this section is limited to a general criticism of theories which attribute prejudice to personality variables. Such weaknesses that are found in the general theory do not completely discredit any special form of it.

Neither the Authoritarian Personality, Frustration-Aggression nor Anomie are a sufficient explanation for prejudice, for there must already exist a minority group that can be made responsible for the current difficulties. Moreover, it hardly explains why one minority group is often chosen as a scapegoat, when there may be several minorities to choose from. Again, why is there sometimes a striking difference in the intensity of dislike of different minorities? Why are minorities at times against other minorities as well as majorities? (See Zawadski, 1948) Some experimental evidence indicates that those high in prejudice do not displace their aggression more than those low in prejudice (Lindzey, 1950).

These questions direct attention to the selection of the target toward which the displaced aggression is directed. Seemingly, there must already exist some hostility toward the minority group in order for the given group to become an accepted object of discrimination. Psychological need may explain one force behind prejudice, but it does not explain which groups are to become the cultural scapegoats. The fact is that certain groups are invidiously treated. The superior-inferior relationship between groups is quite permanent and consistent, important changes being related to specific events. Put concretely, our attitudes to Negroes, Jews, Chinese, etc. are relatively stable. Which groups are singled out, and why, can only be answered by historical analysis; not by the summation of individual needs.

A second major problem is the failure of such theories of prejudice to account for behavioral inconsistencies. A number of studies have demonstrated that individuals bend with the social wind acting in contradictory ways, as the particular situation requires. Behavior is thus viewed as a response to a group situation, and not as a function of individual needs. A few examples will make this clear.

Fensterheim and Birch (1950) observed Jewish displaced persons in an UNRRA camp in Southern Italy.

Upon arrival at the camp, the DPs were disorganized in their social behavior, and manifested non-adaptive aggression. After being in the camp for some time, the individuals joined voluntary groups; these were Zionist groups and were organized along political lines. One group was militaristic, imperialistic, intolerant of minorities and ultranationalistic. Another was socialistic, equalitarian, collectivistic, etc. Members of the former organization continued their aggressive behavior, although it became more channelized and less chaotic, remained quarrelsome and were generally emotionally unstable. Members of the second radically changed. Aggressive and threat behavior became less and less frequent as time went on, more emotionally stable behavior ensued, and other more favorable forms of behavior developed. *There is no evidence that different types of personalities gravitated to a particular group*. In fact, in the formation of the groups, the individuals did not know much about the respective ideologies; and there was hardly any shifting between the groups. All evidence indicates that the behavioral changes were directly related to the different political atmosphere within the groups.

Killian (1953) investigated the way in which poor Southern white migrants ("hillbillies") adjusted to different patterns of ethnic relations in Chicago. He concluded that although they deplored equality, they behaved toward the Negro as the Northern whites did. In another study, Blood (1955) interviewed personnel managers of fifty of the largest retail stores in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, regarding their employment practices. Most managers did not hire Negroes because of their fear of clients' responses, and not because of their own feelings.

Such findings are devastating to the theory that prejudice rests on personality variables. Individuals vary their behavior with the particular situation in a manner inconsistent with the view that psychological needs direct behavior.

Alternative to the Psychological Theory of Values: Conflict of Interests: The fact that very serious criticisms may be directed against various kinds of psychological theories of prejudice raises the question of the alternatives to such theories. If the origins of prejudice do not lie in (or exclusively in) the personality, they must lie in the social structure. One major social structural explanation of prejudice is the conflict of interest theory.

The essence of this theory is that prejudice is rooted in the desire for scarce values and goods. While these scarce values can be anything, wealth, status and power are usually of paramount importance. The struggle for these scarce values is continuous. Few persons refuse the opportunity to exclude competitors from consideration. If the rival is a member of a minority group, this may be exploited to limit his competitive ability. The basis for rejection is minority group membership, as this is a convenient reason for the restrictions. It is emphasized that the competitive process does not only apply to wealth; the fight for power and social status are at times more fierce than that of economic competition.

The conflict of interest theory of prejudice, it may be noted, attributes the phenomena not to some specific personality variable but to the structure of the interactive situation, i.e., the competitive process. However, competition does not explain why particular groups are singled out as targets for discrimination, why, for example, Negroes and not red-heads; nor does it explain the particular form that prejudice may assume in the endless struggle for advantage. For this, a social-historical analysis is required.

How this has operated on the group level may be illustrated by the strategies of the political parties in Germany in the late 1800's. In 1872, Bismarck, then Chancellor, relied upon the support of the National Liberal Party, which he needed to carry out his program, since neither the Conservative nor the Catholic party would back him for fear he would eventually encroach upon their vested interests. In the elections of 1874, the National Liberals received an especially large share of the votes, while the Conservatives — the party with the most prestige and money — were reduced to a small minority. The Conservatives were greatly shaken by this defeat to their traditional privileges. As a result of suffrage they required popular support to remain in power. To gain votes, they deliberately incorporated anti-Semitism into the party platform, and henceforth began an open attack upon the Jews. It is emphasized that the decision to use anti-Semitism was not the result of intensely anti-Jewish leaders, but a deliberately thought out political maneuver.

The Catholic Party, which also had been defeated in the previous elections, joined the Conservatives in attacking the Jews. The Catholics in Germany were a minority, although a much larger minority than the Jews. In this instance, the motives which led the leaders of the Catholic Party to advocate anti-Semitism were more complex than that of the Conservatives. In his efforts to reduce clerical authority, Bismarck was supported by the National Liberals. The Catholics reasoned that by attacking the Liberals they could hinder the Chancellor's anti-Catholicism. Furthermore, although they had increased their strength in the 1874 elections, the Liberals had gained in greater proportions. Consequently, the Catholics' position in the Parliament was vulnerable for its support was not needed. It looked to anti-Semitism to restore a balance of power. Thus two minority groups in 1874, each for different reasons of political expediency, openly agitated against the Jews.[5]

Summary and Conclusions: Individualistic or personality theories of prejudice may be broken down into three major sub-types. Of these the Authoritarian Personality theory is currently the most popular. Although quite complex intensive studies have been undertaken to verify it, the theory itself is rather simple. Anti-Semitism is assumed to be one of a variety of psychological phenomena determined by individual or personality needs. Prejudiced people are thought to manifest a certain type of

[5] The best single source for German political anti-Semitism during this time is Paul Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction* (1949).

personality, often called Fascist-Authoritarian. The genesis of this personality is traced to childhood, where the family is seen as the major causative agent.

The second major individualistic or personality theory of prejudice is the Frustration-Aggression theory. The original hypothesis of the Frustration-Aggression theory asserted that aggression always follows frustration, and that aggression aroused by a source against which one cannot counter-attack will be displaced onto a substitute object, such as a minority group member. A modified form of this hypothesis treats aggression as one of a number of possible responses to frustration. Other modifications discarded the original behavioristic terminology in which the hypothesis was cast. According to the final version, the individual defines for himself what is frustrating, and then reacts to it, possibly by aggression.

In the Anomic theory of prejudice, the individual is seen as responding to a situation in the social structure, in which he experiences a painful uneasiness or anxiety, a feeling of isolation from the group or its standards, and a feeling of goallessness.

Despite their variations, the individualistic theories of prejudice agree in locating the crux of the problem at the core of personality. Prejudice resides "in" the individual and fulfills his inner requirements, leading him to engage in prejudiced activity.

This personality approach has to contend with the situational position, in which individuals are seen as behaving in a manner appropriate to a specific situation or group. Thus depending on which group he joined, the DP became cooperative or remained aggressive. Clearly, the fact that individuals respond to the situation is at variance with the position which holds him to react to inner forces. Moreover, as the example from German politics illustrates, prejudiced activity, at least in part, did not originate as a result of inner needs, but as a deliberately thought out strategy. This is not to say that personality needs were not operative; it is likely that they played an important role in the populace's receptivity.

Prejudiced behavior, then, viewed both on a group and individual level, may be prompted by a desire to achieve certain ends. In this struggle, prejudice may be used as a means to insure the elimination of some competition. Personality needs may be *one* motive for prejudice. However, much of prejudiced activity arises from other motives.

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SOCIOLOGY

Art and Social Values: A Study of Three Utopian Communities

CARLA ANDERSON

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

Though it is agreed that artistic activity is conditioned by social circumstances, statements about the form of such conditioning are tentative and even contradictory. Perhaps one reason for this state of affairs is the assumption that artistic activity is essentially peripheral to the important issues of social life. Confusion about the social conditioning of artistic activity is also occasioned by the great variety of conceptual frameworks from which art is analyzed (Read: 1937; Gotshalk: 1947). In any case, the accumulated body of knowledge on the sociology of art is quite incomplete in comparison with materials available in other areas of sociological study.

At present, any agreement among sociologists of art seems to be limited to the notion that artistic activity comprises three elements — the artist, the art object, and the audience (Barnett: 1959; Tomars: 1940; Sewter: 1935).

Recent work in this field has been largely confined to the popular arts — the mass media of communication; radio, television, movies, and popular literature (Warner & Henry: 1948; Mayer: 1946; Barnett & Gruen: 1948; Leonard: 1958). A strong emphasis on the popular arts is unfortunate since these phenomena do not represent the range of artistic activity in contemporary society. Furthermore, the popular arts do not lend themselves readily to the study of style — one of the few aspects of artistic activity where similarities in time and space are manifest. The failure to distinguish between popular and fine arts seems to be possible only when the emphasis upon the investigation of the popular arts has reached such proportions that the possibility of artistic activity outside the sphere of popular art forms is ignored or forgotten. While the popular arts are quite as worthy of attention, they are more properly considered from Lalo's perspective, as "minor arts," different by nature from the fine arts and serving different audiences, having different subject matter, and employing different techniques (1921).

The most successful attempts to describe the nature of the relation between artistic activity and social structure have been made by anthropologists (Boas: 1955; Adam: 1954; Kroeber: 1930). One important reason for the success of such studies is that the community chosen for anthropological investigation is usually a relatively simple society sustaining one, or at most, a couple of related art styles. The presence of a single art style or of relatively few art styles in a primitive society or in other communities may be attributed to the fact that the individuals in the community are presented with the limited alternatives of a single cultural milieu. In societies with a proliferation of art styles, each struggling for pre-eminence on grounds that become increasingly esoteric and represent greater departures from central social issues, the several styles stand in a tenuous relation to determinative social issues. This is not to say that the artistic activities of complex communities are devoid of social influence. But the contemporary artist is more likely to be a specialist engaged in the business of creating meanings for a coterie of other specialists and a small group of educated laymen. Any single artist in such a situation is not likely to represent more than one social milieu of the many available to the individual in the contemporary world. In the nature of the case, it is difficult for the sociologist to isolate the bearing of any single milieu upon artistic activity.

Artistic activity has become an appropriate concern of sociologists by virtue of the assumption that art is somehow conditioned by the social circumstances surrounding it. This assumption is basic to this study. However, the problem remains: just what is the nature of this conditioning and how does it work? At least two hypotheses