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ABSTRACT
                Social Science Research of the past several decades
provides valuable insight into the processes of prejudice acquisition
and reduction. This paper lists and briefly describes the following
15 findings based on this research and their implications regarding
prejudice and what works to reduce it: (1) attitudes about
interpersonal differences begin to be acquired in infancy; (2)
attitudes may be set or softened by relationships and experiences;
(3) the relationship among attitudes, perceptions, motivation,
feelings, judgments, and behaviors is complex and much of it is
socially mediated and highly contingent on "setting"; (4) because of
this, some would approach the problem through macro-strategies rather
than strategies focused on individual behaviors; (5) many researchers
from minority communities emphasize strategies that reduce the
adverse impact of dominant institutions on minority communities,
while leaving the dominating majority to deal with their own biases;
(6) social contact between groups may foster positive attitudes under
specific conditions; (7) class prejudice may be more powerful than
racial biases; (8) cultural bias may be the most deeply rooted
element in prejudice; (9) nearly 60 percent of any message may be
communicated non-verbally; (10) formal learning approaches have some
limited success; (11) specifically anti-prejudice learning
experiences are generally not successful; (12) multicultural learning
contexts are the most successful for teaching about "other" peoples;
(13) cooperative learning experiences are probably the major resource
for reducing bias; (14) white racism training may be effective for
some areas; and (15) leaders and authority figures may have a
significant influence in reducing bias. Contains six references.
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PREJUDICE REDUCTION: WHAT WORKS?

by

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Prejudice Reduction: What Works?

FORWARD

> "When you label me, you negate me."
> - Søren Kierkegaard

Social science research during the past several decades provides valuable insight into the processes of prejudice acquisition and reduction. Such research suggests that the issues are complex and that simple cause and effect relationships, with clear and easy intervention strategies, may be rare. However, enough is known to guide practitioners wanting general information about what we "know" about prejudice and what "works" most effectively in reducing bias. Several important findings and their implications are noted below.

1.   Distinctions based on differences in gender, race or ethnicity, class, religion, culture, or lifestyle begin in infancy and continue throughout childhood and early adolescence. Affective and evaluative judgements also begin in early infancy and continue into adolescence, conditioned by family, school, group, and community experiences.

2.   Attitudes may be "set" or "softened" by significant personal experiences and mediated by one's family, peer group, and other important groups of reference. Attitudes may change, though not easily, and there is little documentation of permanent change by individuals, though some evidence exists to support the idea that the United States is growing more tolerant of diversity.

3.   The relationship between attitudes, perceptions, motivations, feelings, judgments, and behaviors is complex.   There appears to be no simple uni-directional sequence of cause and effect concerning attitudes and actions. Much behavior appears to be socially mediated and highly contingent on the "setting" in which the individual or institution operates.

4.   This fact leads some change theorists to promote macro-strategies which emphasize institutional change by "authorities," rather than micro-strategies focusing on individual attitudes or behaviors.

5.   Many researchers from minority communities also emphasize strategies which reduce the adverse impact of dominant institutions on minority communities while leaving the dominating majority to deal with their own "white, male, elitist," etc. bias (See #13: White racism training)

6.   Social "contact" between groups may foster more positive attitudes and behaviors by dominant majority communities, but usually only under specific conditions: a) participation is voluntary and approved by authorities and supported by peers; b) the participants get to know and value one another as individuals, rather than "group representatives"; c) participants are of about equal social and economic class status, with other shared functional characteristics such as job roles; d) participants share and achieve some external norms and goals as well as positive goals for their interaction together; e) the group process is cooperative, rather than competitive, and the interaction achieves outcomes valued by all participants. These conditions appear to be necessary, but they may not be sufficient to guarantee positive changes in attitudes or actions. Absent these conditions, however, intergroup interaction often produces increased bias in beliefs or behaviors. (See #13 and #14)

7.   Class prejudice, based on differential access to society's material and psychic resources, and consequent differences in behaviors may be more pervasive, permanent, and powerful in its resistance to change than are racial attitudes. Some evidence suggests class bias conditions racial, ethnic, religious and lifestyle prejudices. Preventive or remedial strategies that take class elitism into account focus on reducing or blurring distinctions based on class differences in attitudes and behaviors. (See #13 and #14)

8.   Cultural bias, rooted in historical, linguistic, belief, value, and behavior systems -- i.e. "world view" differences -- may be the most deeply rooted element in prejudice. If "the eye never sees the lens through which it looks," then the lens of culture may be the most difficult to accommodate in bias reduction strategies. Culture-bound bias may be balanced by the development of a commitment to a positive, multi-cultural world view: one that values all cultures for their unique contributions to the unity in diversity envisioned in the motto "e pluribus unum". (See #13 and #14)

9.   Some communication theorists propose that nearly 60% of the "meaning" in any message is communicated non-verbally through body language, while 20% is conveyed by voice, tone and pace, with "actual content" accounting for less than 20% of the "message achieved." The implication is that individual or institutional body language may be the most powerful communicator in socialization processes affecting the young, or in social interactions, affecting adults. Significant economic, political, social, and cultural institutions, especially schools, businesses and governmental agencies, may communicate and create an elitist, racist, sexist, etc. bias and impact through behaviors, while also espousing non-biased goals and attitudes. Some change theorists advocate "leader" modeling and institutional "matching" of attitudes and behaviors that are positive and non-biased in intention and effect as a tool for significant bias reduction. Leaders and institutions that "walk their talk" may be powerful change agents.

10.   Formal learning approaches -- featuring methods and content -- as forces for change in business, governmental, civic, or educational settings have

some, though limited, success. Such approaches are usually not voluntary, and feature exhortatory -- "do the right thing" -- human relations or race-relations training. Participants tend to resist or reject the "requirement to change," and since these efforts are usually not on-going, or other institutional messages are contradictory, the organization's commitment to a non-biased stance and practice may be questioned by its members.

11.   Learning experiences that focus directly on anti-prejudice, anti-racist, etc. training are usually not effective for similar reasons. (But see #14)

12.   Formal learning about "other" peoples appear to have the greatest success when the curricular content is multi-cultural and integrated into a comprehensive approach to history, sociology, anthropology, etc. Add-on, special emphasis segments do not carry the same impact. (See #9 on organizational "body language"). Multi-cultural curriculum that feature audio-visual or dramatic materials -- movies, plays, books -- that feature believable characters of dominant and non-dominant communities appear to have greater impact as learners develop empathy with such characters. If characters also model positive attitude and behavior changes, learners may be further assisted in exploring and incorporating similar personal changes. Learning "thinking about thinking" skills such as cognitive complexity and high level critical thinking skills also appear to reduce bias.

13.   "Cooperative" learning experiences, whether in schools, businesses, church, civic or community settings are probably the major resource for reducing bias. Research into cooperative learning in schools indicates that collaborative learning -- featuring both individual and group goals and with rewards for both individual and group achievements -- is vastly superior to competitive learning practices. Cooperative learning enhances self-esteem, acceptance of others and improves academic achievement, even when practiced only about 20% of the time in a learning setting. The implications of this research for schools, businesses, civic and community organizations, and public agencies are profound, for the model is a tool that can be adapted in all learning settings, whether formal or informal. Evidence suggests the effective use of cooperative learning strategies and techniques would address bias based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class, or culture. This approach may be one of the most flexible and powerful tools in facilitating social change, especially if the approach can be generalized throughout institutions of all types. Since individuals and institutions are "learning" entities, this approach merits much attention and further development.

14.   "White racism" training, developed by Judy Katz, features white facilitators working with other white people to confront elitist and racist elements of institutional and individual attitudes and behaviors. While untested in a controlled fashion, the approach has significance for the Pacific Northwest since white people must deal with their own racism, rather than simply relying on minority communities to carry the impetus for personal and institutional change. The approach seems appropriate where highly motivated volunteers, with

trained facilitators, have sufficient opportunity to explore their racism, and its effects and its remedies.

15.   "Leaders" or authority figures such as parents, teachers, supervisors, business leaders, and elected officials may have significant influence on reducing bias both by personal modeling of non-bias and through shaping the structures, processes and goals of group behavior. Research suggests that leaders must meet group members needs, especially for social identification, rather than fight against them. This may be done by: a) reducing the salience of out-group "othering" distinctions, b) creating positive expectations about interactions with "others," c) changing group norms for interactions with "others"; and d) fulfillment of social identity needs through alteration of attitudes and behaviors regarding the "othering" process. (e.g. "our group is special or unique because we value the diversity of other people.")

AFTERWORD

All of these practices can be initiated, not only by leaders, but by any self-empowered individual in any setting. Ultimately, however, the reduction of bias arises from changing beliefs and behaviors that "others" people on any basis. Individual and institutional self-transformation through the recognition that there is "no other out there; there is only One within" may appear to be Utopian, but perhaps the time for Utopia is come. That this possibility is achievable is certain, the only questions that truly remain are: "If not me, who? If not now, when?" The poet Wallace Stevens notes: "After the final no there comes a Yes, and on the Yes the future of the world depends."

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