

**Lesson  
Eleven**

# Prejudice and Discrimination

**Aims**

The aims of this lesson are to enable you to:

- define prejudice and discrimination
- explain prejudice at individual, interpersonal and inter-group levels, including the contributions of Adorno and Tajfel
- analyse the contributions of individual, interpersonal and inter-group sources of prejudice and discrimination in everyday situations
- explore ways of reducing prejudice and discrimination using evidence from psychological studies; for example the work of Sherif, and the contributions of Aronson
- assess the likely success of prejudice reduction techniques in everyday situations

**Context**

In the last lesson we looked at stereotyping and other kinds of categorisation. Here we consider the related topics of prejudice and discrimination.



## From Stereotyping to Prejudice and Discrimination

What is the difference between stereotyping and prejudice? In ordinary life, the two words are often used as if they had the same meaning, but psychologists make a distinction. For them, a stereotype is one component part of prejudice – the cognitive or belief element. Prejudice combines this cognitive element with two other components, as follows:

- (a) the **cognitive** component (stereotype, already considered; this is, in itself, neutral);
- (b) the **affective** component – a strong feeling of hostility or liking
- (c) the **behavioural** component – how we act as a result

The behavioural component can take a number of different forms or proceed through various stages. It might start with hostile talk or avoidance and proceed to discrimination (e.g. exclusion from housing), physical attack and finally extermination (even genocide, if the scale is large enough). But it could be that the cognitive and affective components are present, yet the person manages to refrain from any prejudicial behaviour.

Here is a useful working definition of prejudice:

An antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalization directed towards a group as a whole or towards an individual because he is a member of that group. It may be felt or expressed.  
(Allport, 1954)

Experiments (e.g. **Adorno, 1950**; see below) have hinted that a person who is prejudiced against one group is likely to be prejudiced against a variety of other groups as well. That means that some people are more prone to prejudice than others. Thus, more simply, we can say that prejudice is a tendency to react negatively or unfairly to *anyone* who has a different background. But remember that prejudices *can* also be positive!

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Self-Assessment<br/>Test 1</b>   | What are the three components of prejudice? |
|  |   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Activity 1</b>   | Are <i>you</i> prejudiced against any racial, ethnic or minority group? Think carefully. |
|  |  |

If your answer was “no” (and you are right!), you are probably in a small minority. But there is also a fair chance that you found it difficult to analyse your own feelings and beliefs. Most of us find it uncomfortable to study our own prejudices although some are very open about them.

## Adorno and the Authoritarian Personality

**T.W. Adorno** was one psychologist who supported the idea that some people are more prone to prejudice than others and in 1950 he and some colleagues set out to prove it with what turned out to be some very controversial research.

Adorno proposed the concept of the **authoritarian personality**. This is a type of person who is prejudiced because of specific personality traits, predisposing them to be hostile towards racial/ethnic and other minority or “out” groups. What are those personality traits according to Adorno? The signs are a hostility to people of inferior status, servility (over-respect) for people of superior status, conventional or conservative values, intolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty, lack of introspection and contempt for weakness. These are generally faults rather than qualities so it is safe to say that you would not want to be labelled as authoritarian by Adorno.

In Britain today, we might think of the authoritarian type as someone who joins the National Front or perhaps as a football hooligan. In Adorno’s day, the key word was “fascism” after the Italian political party which endorsed many authoritarian values, although, after the war, fascism was a dirty word in America and Britain. This gave Adorno the infamous **F-scale**,

a way of measuring someone's authoritarian/prejudicial tendencies, irrespective of who they were prejudiced against.

In particular, Adorno looked at **anti-Semitism** (prejudice against Jews), **ethnocentrism** (the belief that one's own ethnic group is superior) and political-economic **conservatism**. He found that there was a strong link between all three (anti-semites tended to be ethnocentric, and so on) and that these viewpoints were also linked to the personality traits mentioned above.

Not content with that, Adorno also offered evidence that there was a link between the authoritarian personality and a certain kind of upbringing, i.e. one that was harsh and disciplinarian, with parents who were unable to show their love effectively and who are now resented.

The F-scale or variations upon it have been used to predict behaviour in a wide variety of areas. Individuals with a high F-score are more likely to support the police, to recommend longer sentences when sitting on juries, to vote Conservative, to hold sexist views, etc.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Self-Assessment<br/>Test 2</b>   | What is the origin of the term 'F-scale'? |
|  |   |

## Criticisms of Adorno

Although there is plenty of laboratory work which supports and extends Adorno's theory, it is also true that there are a number of criticisms which can be levelled at Adorno's research.

Certainly, it leaves a number of questions unanswered. If some personalities are inclined towards prejudice and some are not, how can we explain the fact that at certain times whole groups of people seem to display the same prejudice? In

Nazi Germany, hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of people, displayed violently racist attitudes and behaviour. Yet those people must have differed greatly in terms of other personality characteristics. Did they all have the same upbringing? Would they *all* have had high F-scores?

In a similar way, levels of prejudice across a broad spread of society do not remain constant. Anti-semitism disappeared dramatically in Germany after the war was lost. In the same way, prejudice in Britain against German people diminished. We would have to conclude that there are many other factors besides personality and upbringing in the development of prejudice.

Other commentators have criticised the link Adorno makes between the authoritarian personality and right-wing political views. Those holding left-wing political views can be just as dogmatic (e.g. hard-line communists). Orwell's *1984* shows us that the key difference in political viewpoints is not between right and left but between liberalism and totalitarianism. It is possible that 'totalitarian' (rather than 'conservative') would have been a better choice for Adorno's F-scale.

## The Consequences of Prejudice in Behaviour

As we have seen, the cognitive and affective components of prejudice usually (but not always) lead to discrimination and behaviour which is damaging to the object of that prejudice. Unless we have ourselves been the victim of prejudice, it is not always easy to appreciate the degree of that damage.

**Allport** (1954) proposed five categories of prejudicial behaviour, in order of seriousness:

- (a) **anti-locution** – insults, hostile words, racial jokes
- (b) **avoidance** – e.g. crossing to the other side of the street or excluding from conversation
- (c) **discrimination** – the use of political or social power to deny opportunities that are granted to others (e.g. in jobs, housing)
- (d) **physical attack** – against a person or property
- (e) **extermination** – violence against a large group (to the extreme of genocide)

If insults and avoidance do not have the desired effect, the prejudiced person or group may proceed to more drastic courses of action.

When prejudice is shown not by an individual but by a whole group, it may become **institutionalised**, that is, turned into laws or broad social principles. Apartheid is a good example of this. This political system, as practised in South Africa, involved clear-cut legal distinctions between individuals on the basis of race or skin colour. 'Coloured' people would be excluded from beaches, schools or buses reserved for 'whites' only, while the majority did not have the vote and therefore could not change the system.

At group level, one of the most extreme examples of prejudice is war between nations or between different groups within a country (civil war). The treatment of Kurdish minorities in Iraq and Turkey shows what happens when one group is stronger than another, as indeed is usually the case. Unwanted minorities can be exterminated altogether.

In Britain, prejudice tends to be covert (secret) rather than overt (open). There are many laws designed to prevent racial and sexual discrimination and, as we have seen, there is a code of political correctness which frowns on any instances of prejudice from those in positions of power or influence. But we still see prejudice and discrimination at many different individual and group levels.

Bullying at school is usually the result of prejudice of one kind or another while the fierce rivalry between different groups of sports fans, often culminating in violence, has given the British a sorry reputation overseas. The National Front may have no MPs but it has strong support in areas where there is a broad mix of racial groups.

Perhaps because Britain was once one of the strongest and most 'advanced' countries in the world, **ethnocentrism** is still commonplace across the country. This is the belief that one's own ethnic group is better than others and the tendency to judge all other groups from the perspective of one's own social norms ('typical foreigner – doesn't even understand cricket!').

Adorno's work has given us one explanation for the origins of prejudice and discrimination but, as we shall see, there are others.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Self-Assessment<br/>Test 3</b>   | Of what sort of prejudice is apartheid a good example? |
|  |  |

## The Origins of Prejudice and Discrimination

Theories about the origins of prejudice tend to fall into two categories – *personality theories* and *social psychological theories*.

We have already considered the most important of the personality theories (Adorno's) so we will look now at some of the alternative theories put forward by social psychologists.

## Prejudice and Conformity

Such psychologists (Brown, Minard, Pettigrew, Campbell and others) have often concentrated on the differences between individual inclination and group norms. Thus the main source of prejudice may be the desire or need to conform to social norms.

**Minard** (1952) put together a study of coal-miners in West Virginia in a part of the USA where, at that time, there was much open discrimination against black people. Minard found that there was almost complete integration between blacks and whites below ground and almost complete segregation above. Thus, as individuals, these men were not truly prejudiced against each other but, because of wider group pressure, they had to endorse prejudicial values and institutions in their wider social lives. **The pressure to conform** was stronger than other factors affecting their behaviour. In societies where prejudice has become institutionalised (e.g. Nazi Germany), the failure to conform and obey orders might itself carry very severe penalties like ostracism or prison.

Pressures to conform and the resulting prejudice are often seen in societies where one group is in a dominant position and other groups are seen as posing a threat to their privileges.

## Inter-Group Conflict: Deprivation and Competition

Prejudice tends to increase if individuals or groups think they are being deprived of something they might have if it were not for the existence of another group. An unemployed person from the native population may complain that ‘these immigrants come in and steal all our jobs – why don’t they go back where they came from?’

Such inter-group conflict is likely to be most pronounced when there is a clear and obvious **competition** between two groups for scarce resources. If there are jobs for everyone, it is not such a problem, but in times of depression, inter-group tensions become more pronounced. So **deprivation** may by itself be a cause of prejudice.

**Sherif** (1961) conducted the famous **Robber’s Cave Experiment** to explore the nature of inter-group conflict. In a situation reminiscent of Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Sherif collected together 22 ‘normal’ white, middle-class Protestant boys for a summer camp. They did not know each other and they were randomly assigned to two groups of eleven. In the course of a week, the group-members were encouraged to ‘bond’ together with various team activities. Then they were told of the existence of the other group and a forthcoming sports tournament between the two groups – very quickly an ‘us and them; feeling developed.

With the promise of various splendid prizes for the winners, behaviour deteriorated rapidly and fights broke out between members of the two groups. The losing group stole the prizes from the winners. When interviewed afterwards, virtually all the boys showed a strong preference for other members of their own group, whom they described as brave, tough and friendly. Members of the ‘out-group’, on the other hand, were described as sneaky stinkers or smart alics. Yet they had all been from the same social group originally.

This experiment showed how quickly prejudice can develop and how ‘anti-social’ the consequences can be. It demonstrated the key rôle of education or conditioning in the process of prejudice formation. Sherif also wondered whether

it would be possible to re-educate the boys to a different set of prejudices in the same short space of time. Extensions of the Robber's Cave experiment are considered in the next lesson.

## Frustration

Many psychologists have seen prejudice as an 'adjustive' mechanism, helping people to make up for feelings of personal inadequacy or frustration.

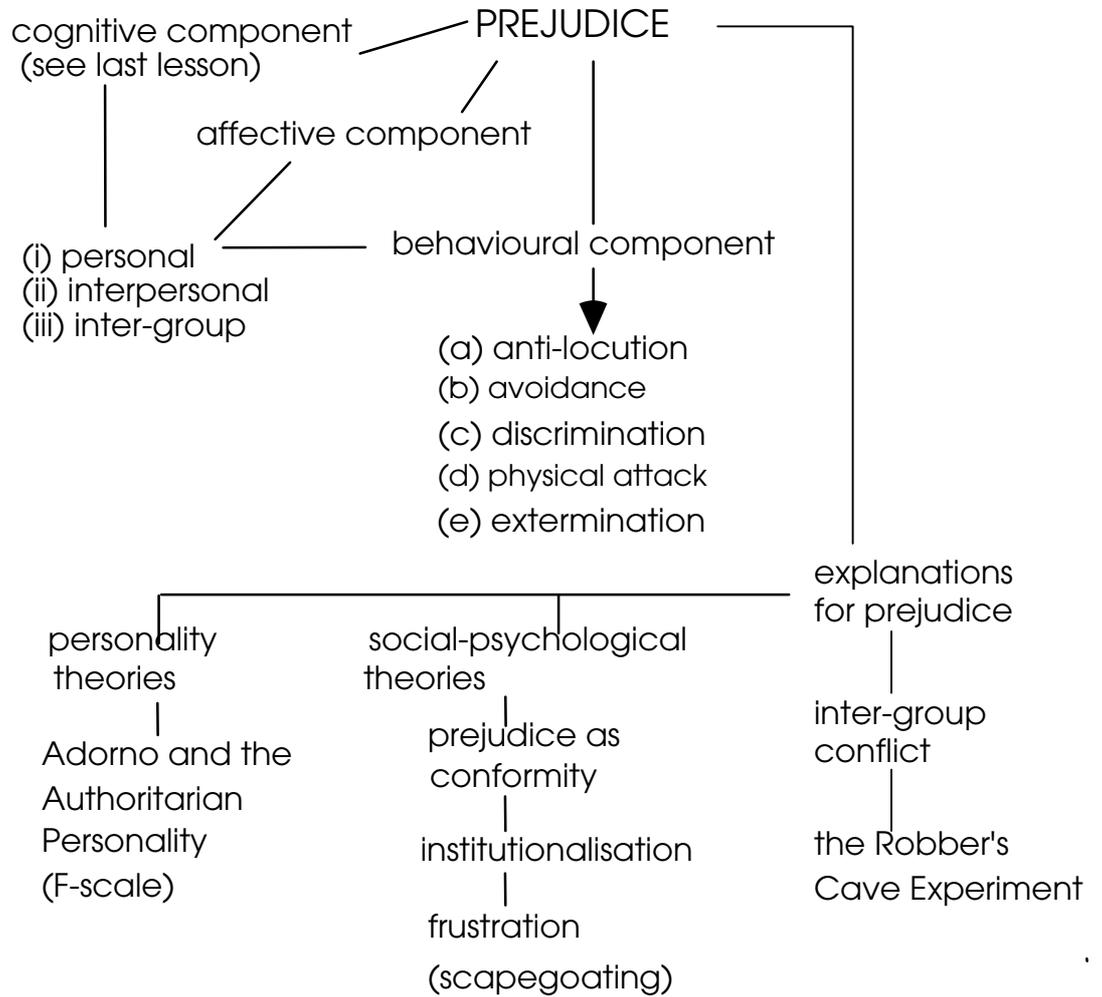
The individual's self-concept can be reinforced if an individual or group out there can be seen as deserving of being despised. 'I'm not so bad because x is worse than me.' It hardly matter who the **scapegoat** is, but someone is needed to serve as the object of bottled-up frustrations.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Self-Assessment<br/>Test 4</b></p>  | <p>Into which category of theories about the origins of prejudice does this adjustive mechanism theory of frustration fall?</p> |
|  |   |

In each class at school, there are often one or two individuals who have been identified by the rest as 'legitimate' targets for the rest. They are perceived subconsciously as outcasts and various forms of aggressive behaviour are considered as OK if applied to them. Such 'natural victims' may not be different in any obvious sense from the victimisers who are working out their own frustrations.

The theories of social psychologists may seem to compete with those of the personality theorists but it is possible to accept that there is more than an element of truth in both accounts. Different instances of prejudice may be best explained by different theories. In the next lesson, we will consider different ways in which prejudice can be modified and reduced.

### Summary: Prejudice



## In-Groups and Out-Groups

Philosophers and religious leaders have yearned for a society in which all men and women are equal and there is no prejudice. In practice, this is very unlikely to occur. For better or worse, human beings like to feel part of a group and that group's identity is largely defined by what it is *not* — who is not allowed to be a member.

Such divisions occur at every level of society and give us the distinction between **in-groups** and **out-groups**. The in-group are the members of a certain sub-set within society as a whole, while the out-group is the rest of the society which is excluded from those privileges. Members of the out-group may well wish to join the in-group.

### Activity 2

Imagine that you are the teacher of a mixed group of 10-11-year-olds. They come from a variety of racial backgrounds and you become aware that members from one group rarely talk to members from another and that there is evidence of prejudice between different individuals and groups.

What can you do about it? Can you think of any basic strategies which might help you reduce prejudice?



Here are a few ideas that may be adopted by the working teacher:

- (1) **education** — explain the lifestyles and differences of the different groups in a non-judgmental way. Prejudice thrives on ignorance and a sense of ‘otherness’ so anything which draws on the common humanity and interests of ‘different’ individuals should help.
- (2) **co-operation rather than competition** — as we saw in the last lesson, competition for scarce resources can be a cause of prejudice. Instead of pitting the children against each other, devise activities where they can be split into multi-racial groups so that they have to employ teamwork in order to achieve common goals.
- (3) **equalisation** — make sure that you are seen to treat all individuals equally, whatever their group. Encourage them to see each other as equals. The very theory of ‘comprehensive’ schooling is linked to the idea that equalisation has positive social benefits.

But are all these techniques likely to have the same positive effect? Or are you doing more harm than good? Psychologists disagree on the best approach for tackling prejudice and we will look in more detail at the pros and cons of different strategies.

## Equals in Non-Competitive Contact

**Allport** (1954) sums up the theory quite neatly:

Prejudice [unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual] may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if the contact is sanctioned by institutional supports.

The important thing here is that contact in itself is not going to have much effect on prejudice — it must be contact *as equals*. Employer-employee contact may increase prejudice, not reduce it, because of the nature of the relationship. But residents of the same housing estate, for instance, may learn to integrate and treat each other as equals.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Self-Assessment<br/>Test 5</b>   | Look at the last sentence of the quotation from Allport. Can you remember an experiment already mentioned in an earlier lesson which would back up this point? |
|  |  |

## Pursuit of the Same Goals

As Allport says, pursuit of common goals helps break down prejudice. For example, membership of a society or club, with club-members working towards common objectives, should have a positive effect.

Members of a cricket team, for instance, may be from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds but, in the course of playing together and sharing social facilities, different individuals ought to achieve a greater understanding and tolerance for their team-mates, whatever their background. But it is also possible that competitive rivalry will develop within the team or that it will fragment into different cliques (in-groups within an in-group), each protecting their own interests.

**Aronson** (1978) developed the **jigsaw technique** for breaking down prejudice in the classroom. As well as assigning individual class members to small inter-racial groups, he gave each member of the group a piece of material which represented one portion (a jigsaw piece) of the lesson to be learnt. Each child would then be responsible for conveying it to the rest of the group and finally every child would be tested according to the content of the *whole* lesson.

## Extensions of the Robber's Cave Experiment

As we saw in the last lesson, **Sherif** (1961) showed in his Robber's Cave experiment how easy it was for prejudice to develop amongst a group of otherwise well-adjusted boys. But Sherif also wanted to find out whether it was just as easy to eradicate that prejudice afterwards.

After stirring up so much prejudice and mistrust, Sherif tried, first of all, to introduce equal-status contact situations. For instance, the boys were asked to fill up questionnaires together, to eat and see movies together. None of this did anything to reduce friction between the two groups.

Co-operative projects, on the other hand, made a big difference. They combined to sort out the camp's water supply, to pay for the hire of a video and to pull on a rope when a truck got stuck. More mundane efforts to make meals together and pitch tents also contributed to the breaking down of group divisions. By the end of the 'holiday', 65% of friendship choices were now being made from the opposite group and they even voted to share the bus home.

The boys may not have realised that they were being manipulated but various points need to be made about the reasons why the pursuit of common goals made such a big difference. First of all, the shared efforts *worked*. If the mixed group had failed to fix the water supply, it might have increased mutual dislikes (through blame and recrimination). It's also important that different team-members should have separate and distinct rôles in the overall process. If there is a duplication of rôles, it is likely that rivalry will develop. In the real world, group-work is rarely so harmonious, successful and controlled.

## Education: Re-drawing the Boundaries

Separation and segregation make it difficult for people to get to know each other as people. To diminish our fear of what we don't understand, we tend to categorise it into one big out-group and everything is set for **autistic hostility** — ignorance leading to lack of understanding of another's actions. Both sides inevitably see themselves as being 'in the right'.

But it is possible to re-educate others so that the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' are re-drawn in a constructive way. An individual who was formerly consigned to an out-group can, with a fresh approach or new definition, be invited into the in-group. Eventually, the boundaries may be re-drawn in such a way that no one is excluded.

It is easy for us to put people into categories and complacency can set in very easily. Instead, all of us have to learn to be alert to the individual differences between people, rather than

the fact that they belong to a group which we think is different from ourselves.

## Rôle Models

Public figures can make a big difference in the process of re-education because they are **rôle models** for others to follow. Such rôle models can be positive or negative. If figures we respect are seen to be non-prejudiced, there is a fair chance we will follow their example.

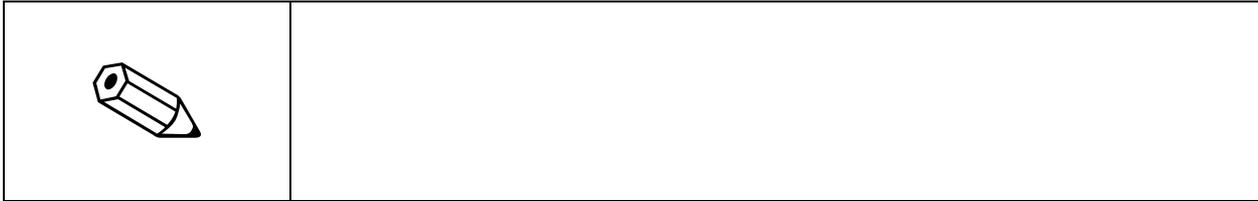
Even better, the individuals who become rôle models may actually reflect the diversity of the world in which they live. Professional footballers, for instance, are rôle models for many young people and it is likely that society as a whole has benefited from the large-scale introduction of black players in to the game at the top level.

Liverpool F.C., for instance, had almost never had a black player in the first team until John Barnes (who was born in Jamaica) arrived. The supporters had often shown their prejudices by shouting racial insults at visiting black players but now they had one who was representing *them*. Not only that but Barnes was playing with a skill, self-control and dignity which was a cut above almost all his fellow professionals. Gradually, Liverpool supporters stopped being so abusive to visiting black players. The same pattern was seen at a number of other clubs.

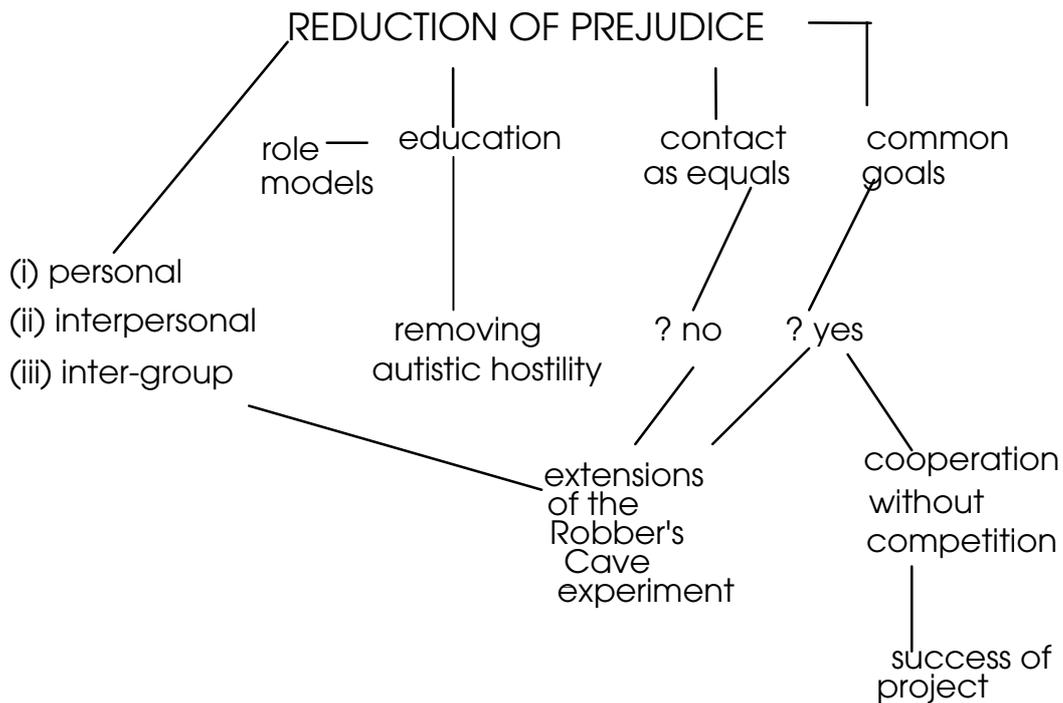
But it is hard for individuals from out-groups to achieve positions of power and influence. Barnes may have succeeded by virtue of his talent (and in the face of many prejudices against black players — that they were too ‘lazy’, ‘individualistic’, ‘uncommitted’, etc) but where were the Asians amongst the thousands of professional footballers? Why were no Asians playing cricket for Yorkshire? How many ethnic groups are personally represented in Parliament? It will be a long time before racial (and sexual) prejudice are eradicated from our society altogether, if indeed they ever are.

### Self-Assessment Test 6

Define autistic hostility.



**Summary: Reduction of Prejudice**



**Practice Test: Prejudice**

1. How are the behavioural components of prejudice likely to show themselves? Give an example of different types.(10 marks)
  
2. How can we explain prejudice? Give a brief analysis which attempts, in contrasting ways, to throw some light on this question.

(15 marks)

(Total: 25 marks)

## Suggested Answers to Self-Assessment Tests

### SAT 1

The three components of prejudice are the cognitive, affective and behavioural.

### SAT 2

F is for Fascist. The Fascists were originally a political party with strong authoritarian policies. So Adorno designed the F-Scale to measure certain specific 'authoritarian' personality traits.

### SAT 3

Institutionalised.

### SAT 4

The personality category.

### SAT 5

The Minard study of miners in West Virginia, mentioned in the last lesson, brings out this support very well. When institutional support was withdrawn, individuals were unable to show the same camaraderie as they had shown underground.

### SAT 6

Autistic hostility: ignorance of others, leading to a failure to understand their actions.

## Suggested Answers to Practice Test

1. How are the behavioural components of prejudice likely to show themselves? Give an example of different types. (10 marks)

---

In general terms, there are five behavioural components of prejudice. These are as follows:

- (a) anti-locution — swearing at someone
- (b) avoidance — crossing to the other side of the street
- (c) discrimination — offering a job to a less qualified individual from one's own social group
- (d) physical attack — football fans fighting each other
- (e) extermination — the Holocaust; 'ethnic cleansing'.

2. How can we explain prejudice? Give a brief analysis which attempts, in contrasting ways, to throw some light on this question. (15 marks)

---

Explanations of prejudice have tended to fall into two distinct but overlapping categories — personality theories and social-psychological theories.

The most famous of the personality theorists is Adorno who devised a test designed to show connections between a personality type (the 'authoritarian' personality) and prejudiced or racist behaviour.

But personality does not develop in isolation and even Adorno was interested in linking personality types to particular social environments —especially a child's relationship with its parents.

Social-psychological theories have linked prejudice to patterns of conformity, competition and education. One experiment which could be said to combine all these elements was the so-called 'Robber's Cave' experiment set up by Sherif. Sherif showed how quickly a perception of social difference and prejudice could be set up even where individuals were from just one homogeneous social grouping. Once we have internalised our membership of team, tribe, gang or ethnic

group, our instinct for conformity may well over-ride values which, as individuals, we would 'normally' subscribe to.

(Total: 25 marks)