

Prejudice and Equality – In Search of Purpose- Driven Interdisciplinary Methodologies in Academia

Mônica MASTRANTONIO MARTINS ¹

ABSTRACT

Prejudice is conceived as a distorted appropriation of reality, in which characteristics that are not accepted in oneself are projected on another human being, group, or society. Prejudice is present in actions, language and attitudes much before being crystalized in adult perceptions. This article aims to highlight the fact that prejudiced-biased relationships – the other person is as the object of this relationship (Frankfurt School), and not an active subject capable of responding in equal terms to it. The object of prejudice uses the other person's definition even to oneself. The methodology used in this research shows how science may produce biased knowledge. Two researches are used in Social Psychology to show how creating categories to define others - without consent or negotiation - may result in prejudice in science. Biased information can indirectly lead to conclusions, which relate to others as non-humans – e.g., holocaust, slavery, gender-gap. Science is not neutral. In result, it is much necessary to question the methodologies and ideologies used in research practice. In conclusion, it is necessary to create new approaches that are inclusive and take action towards a more compromised science with promoting changes.

Key Words: Humanities, Prejudice, Social Psychology, Methodology, Frankfurt School

INTRODUCTION

The understanding of prejudice is, and it has always been, an important goal in Social Psychology (Legault, Green-Demers, Eadie, 2009: 11). Prejudice was frequently used in the past in humanities studies in which activists and change-makers use to rely on it to promote

Atıf İçin / For Citation: MASTRANTONIO MARTINS, M. (2021). Prejudice and Equality –In Search of Purpose- Driven Interdisciplinary Methodologies in Academia. Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler ve Eğitim Dergisi – USBED, Cilt/Volume 3, Sayı/Issue 5, 351-360. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/usbed>

Makale Türü / Article Type: Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Gönderilme Tarihi / Submission Date: 07.05.2021

Kabul Tarihi / Accepted Date: 21.06.2021

¹ Visiting Professor; University of York Department of Social Psychology, Heslington, York, United Kingdom
E-mail: monica.mastrantonio@york.ac.uk ORCID: 0000-0002-3299-501X

equality and inclusion. Nowadays, words range from decolonization and anti-patriarchy to demonstrate how the annihilation of the other is engendered in our society. This article shows that prejudice is still a most needed concept to explain how inequality is based on the distortion of reality - the imperative that one is superior to others – imposing one’s concept upon the other and focusing on research activities in the humanities field.

Garth (1930) used 73 studies on race to show how in all of them the concept of "the mental superiority of the white race" is argued. This means that these studies were used as pre-conception and prejudice favoring the white race in science.

Prejudice, as a distorted appropriation of reality, produces a net of complex relationships, which have this superiority postulate in its base. The Frankfurt School defines traditional superior attitudes on every issue as “prejudice.” Adorno’s studies (1950) on the authoritarian personality show how prejudiced-traditional beliefs can give support to fascism and other distorted realities.

Prejudice presents itself as a biased construction of the “other” (in this case, another human being, group, or society). Because it is not based on real principles, but on the configuration of a relationship in which the subject and object of that relationship are dissociated - the determination of subject is imposed towards the object throughout the “authoritarian relationship.” This means this relationship is not only unequal, but it is unilateral, just like a “one-way road.” The “other” is consequently voiceless, the victim of a unilateral relationship. The other becomes the “invisible,” “inexistent,” “annihilated” in the face of the subject’s view and power.

For Ackerman and Jahoda (1969), prejudice is an attitude, a predisposition to this behavior that may or may not be realized, depending on several factors. Nevertheless, the attitude of hostility directed against an individual or entire group would potentially be always there – even if not manifesting. On the other hand, this shows that provisional judgment can be transformed after contact and knowledge with the other. Prejudice can be changed – and the

change happens when there is knowledge about the other. However, the pre-concept may become prejudice if there is no change in the conception even after having real contact with other groups or individuals.

In the study of Banaji e Greenwald (1995) on prejudice and stereotypes, it is shown how this biased information may influence our decisions even when there is no consciousness of behaving like that. Thus, an opinion formed without knowledge of the facts, a judgment made without reflection, an old idea the routine that does not rely on serious evidence and arguments may crystalize as prejudice.

Prejudice is a way of relating to others without fully considering them. These may happen everywhere – and in science, in scientific projects, and in research. Subjectivity and social relations may be engendered by prejudice or not. This takes into account that every single decision in science is also either based on equality principles or prejudice.

Prejudiced-distorted constructions of reality are difficult to be noted and even harder to being dis-constructed. It requires unlearning a whole network of concepts to create new ones. In prejudiced relationships, those who manifest prejudice and those who suffer from it become expectations' of social relations, following standardized models that end up imprisoning them both.

For Crochik (1996: 44), this may happen frequently in typing of individuals, classification, the building of categories. This happens when individuals are typed in a tight, decontextualized, and anti-historical way. Such typing restricts human multiplicity, alienating people from the possibility of existing outside these classifications.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1985: 205) say, “Classification is the condition of knowledge, not knowledge itself, and knowledge, in turn, destroys classification.” While building classifications for understanding a particular object, consequently, these standards may imprison the other in submissive ways. The other here only exists as an object of the

authoritarian personality. These distorted and erroneous classifications of reality may be found in discriminations of all sorts including academia.

Carone (1995: 111) also addresses this issue when discussing the classification of personality disorders, and pointing that extra care should be taken into account when using any classification, because when dissociated from its context, it may promote even further prejudice or lack of criticism.

Academia and scientists are not biased-free from nature. They are social beings and this article aims to highlight how prejudice may affect their choices in research, and how more equality-based methods should be used in science and education.

Prejudice, Social Psychology, and Research

Social Psychology understands that humanity produces itself - human beings are both influenced and influence their surroundings. Consequently, any scientific data produced is not a neutral action – once it is a human activity. Data produced by science can be used to - maintain either society as it is, or to create more equal relationships, question actual biased information, and combat prejudice.

Examples of biased-scientific papers will be used to demonstrate this assumption and how scientists may be biased by information and their backgrounds and may produce biased information. This means the scientific community is not immune to social factors that influence our living in society, but as knowledge – it can be used to subside different targets. Schools are the places where the scientific way of producing knowledge is taught and it is important that it ask itself the same questions addressed here. “Who are the beneficiaries of it, what is the purpose of it? Is it contributing to demystify prejudice or to add upon it?”

In the very construction of language, some concepts and terms are embedded in prejudice, while others are in activism and the production of equality. Most of the terms that are used in science tend to classify human beings, their backgrounds and sometimes even attribute characteristics and outline humanity. Prejudice is easily spotted in language when there is a

generalization of characteristics that are particular to a certain group, person, or object, or when there is no flexibility and contextualization of terms and concepts – lacking in historical contextualizing.

Examples are in the attitudes, assumptions, and hypotheses. For instance – the assumption that people who live in slums are potentially marginal and violent. In this context, researchers would be producing data to track this violence and marginal actions and adapt these people to society. Data may show violent numbers in slums, but are they the result of violence, or are they the result of other violent acts in other neighborhoods being down-reported? What are the criteria that label them as violent? What is the percentage of the population who is living there compared to other neighborhoods? Are they violent because they are violent or because violence is part of their daily way of surviving?

METHOD

This article aims to des-construct social assumptions that involve the other-persons in our research – otherwise – the prejudice concept tends to repeat itself in science. First, it will be shown that prejudice exists in science, and secondly, how to include other people as part of the research process.

It is needed to go one step back and ask all possible questions while including the object of our research for a more equal approach in humanities in order *not* to reproduce the standardization of expectations without reflexive and critical thinking – both aims of Critical Social Psychology. If prejudice is the distorted and erroneous classifications of reality – this may happen when these classifications are taken as unhistorical, unbiased, neutral, deterministic, and authoritarian.

Part of science has been based on prejudice towards minorities creating theories that tend to make humanity feel different from each other – see all de-colonization and anti-patriarchy studies. From the theory of evolution to the ones that post primitive people as lazy and

unhealthy, to discourse across race and ethnicity factors - there is far more prejudice than we suppose (Greenwald; Schuh, 1994).

However, as far as we are allowed to see, prejudice feels more like a symptom of what a hitherto society which has been silenced about what makes us equal among one other. The strength of equal relationships needs to deeply penetrate our objectives and proposals. According to Lasch (1987: 47), the culture of narcissism is a survival strategy in the face of adversities,

“Selective apathy, emotional disengagement in others, the renunciation of the past and the future, the determination to live one day at a time - such techniques of emotional self-management, necessarily taken to the extreme in extreme conditions, began to configure, in more moderate ways, the lives of ordinary people in conditions normal of a bureaucratic society. Reflections on prejudice - in search of more human and less rational relations and there are few parameters for a critique of the prejudices present in these opinions.”

Today's society also contributes to the constitution of prejudice by naturalizing certain characteristics as if they were exclusive members of a certain culture, race, or religion. The popular ideas that are imbricated in some of the popular actions are, for example, the idea that immigrants increase unemployment without seeing the many benefits that they can bring to society.

For Crochik (1996: 44), “The classification of individuals, in reality, is not the result of scientific categories, but of the social transformation itself: individuals have become propitious to being typified.” That is, the ordering of behaviors and attitudes may easily lead to prejudice and biased perspectives of reality. Prejudice happens when individuals are typified in a watertight, decontextualized, and anti-historical way. The main problem is that such classifications and ordination restrict human multiplicity, alienating people from the possibility of existing outside these classifications.

For instance, the existence of personality disorders in the authoritarian-personality identified in fascism may be regarded as social maladjustment, or even misanthropy, and psychotherapy could be indicated as an instrument for the adaptation of the authoritarian person. The same

may happen with the cultural background of many of the prejudiced minorities who are only now gaining more space to being able to produce their relationships.

In this case, negative factors that are difficult to accept in oneself are projected onto the "other", representing in them – one's difficulties and weaknesses. The persecutions from George Floyd to uncountable people may exemplify the extent to which prejudice encompasses destructive elements in our society and how much this is present in the daily deaths due to poverty, race hate, gender hate, age hate, and the list could go on. Disqualified from human aspects and presented as objects, they become vulnerable-preys in attacks of all sorts.

Crochik (1995: 43) points out that prejudice works as a defense mechanism in the face of new social relations and novelties. Adorno (1986: 37) explains elements that must be rescued in the construction of a society free from prejudice. A society that produces and reproduces prejudiced relationships is the same society that produces uncritical individuals, who easily accept and reproduce fake news and dogmas. The lack of questioning and the construction of speeches that justify prejudice are products of "bad conscience". The "bad conscience" is the conscience deformed by a random knowledge – ultimately - a distortion of the other, of reality, and oneself.

Prejudice – from classifications to extermination

The largest problem of prejudice appears when seeking to eliminate the "other," object of projection of negative aspects not accepted in oneself, as the case in the holocaust and extermination groups. Such barbarities incomprehensible in our conscience, however, have sometimes scientific explanations for such facts.

In the Holocaust, Kershaw (apud Hobsbawn, 1995: 13) says, "a regime founded on an absolutely repulsive ideology of racial hatred, one of Europe's most culturally and economically advanced countries planned the war, launched a worldwide conflagration that killed some 50 million of people, and perpetrated atrocities."

Prejudice is the falsification and misrepresentation of reality by attributing conflicting elements to the "other". It is the projection of negative aspects in front of an object when it is not possible to deal with these aspects in itself, attributing such fragility to the "other". Prejudice can be correlated with ideology when it justifies existing social contradictions and differences according to classifications of race, color, religion, sex, among others.

Public opinion may also present prejudiced elements, but it should not be confused with prejudice. It can collaborate in the construction of the same when it globalizes particular aspects, taking facts from the private to the public sphere in a random, dogmatic, and decontextualized way. For Adorno (1969: 141), "having an opinion, enunciating, is something that is constituted in some measure against the experience and tends to the illusion."

Opinions and dogmas may, in principle, facilitate the spread of prejudice as they make it difficult to reflect and to form critical individuals. According to Marcuse (1972: 120): "Man, in order to conduct himself, has no need for problems, but beliefs. Your cradle must be surrounded by dogma; and, when his reason awakens, he must find all his opinions ready."

The difficulty in dealing with diversity is also present when diverse cultures, races, and religions are presented as anonymous, unknown, and violent. The competitiveness of this society favors hostile relations and the annulment of the other human being, especially when the supremacy of one over the other means survival of oneself. Therefore, perhaps, this is the cruelest example of what prejudice is and what is done in its name – which someone has to outlive the other.

In this case, negative factors that are difficult to accept in oneself are more easily projected in the "other." In this case, "the only thing left for us is the revolt against the human condition that we have not chosen", warns Kundera (1995: 103). For such an undertaking "nothing more is required than freedom, and of course, it is more harmless among everything that can be called freedom, namely, that of making public use of reason, of your reason in all

elements", says Kant (1992: 13). Self-reflective reason can enable the construction of a society in which men can identify themselves and be identified as human beings.

Crochik (1995: 18) also shares Kant's position when he points out that, "experience and reflection are the basis for the constitution of the individual in his relationship with culture, and his absence characterizes prejudice."

Unbiased actions and research will be possible when each individual is seen as a particular being and, at the same time, representative of the human race, since "only those who allow themselves to see themselves as the other, in other words, identify with this person, are in solidarity." (Crochik, 1995: 106).

CONCLUSION

Finally, to reflect on the issue of prejudice is that it requires not only humility in the acceptance that the world cannot be built alone, but also ethics to respect the "other" as the "other" wants and has the right to be – and not as one would like the "other" to be. This shall happen when equality concepts are not needed anymore because it has developed itself in such a way that everyone is fully acknowledged and respected. By then, relationships will have become humane; they will not need the poem below.

REFERENCES

- Ackerman, N.W. & Jahoda, M. (1969). Emotional disorders and anti-Semitism. SP: Perspectiva.
- Adorno, T.W. (1986). Education after Auschwitz. In: Sociology. SP: Ática.
- Adorno, T.W. (1969). Opinion, madness, society. In: Interventions. Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores.
- Adorno, T.W. & Horkheimer, M. (1985). Dialectic of enlightenment. RJ: Jorge Zahar.
- Banaji M.R.; Greenwald A.G. (1995) Implicit gender stereotyping in judgments of fame. J Pers Soc Psychol. 1995 Feb;68(2):181-98. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.68.2.181. PMID:7877095.

- Carone, I. (1995). Critical theory and social psychology: the impact of the Social Research Institute on psychosocial research. In: Psychology and politics. SP: Cortez.
- Crochik, J. L. (1995). Prejudice: individual and culture. SP: Robe Editorial.
- Crochik, J. L. (1996). Notes on the psychology of TW Adorno. In: Psychology & Society, v. 8, n. 1, Jan./Jun. 1996. Magazine of the Brazilian Association of Social Psychology - ABRAPSO.
- Garth, T. R. (1930). A review of race psychology. Psychological Bulletin. 27 (5): 329–56. Doi:10.1037/h0075064
- Greenwald, A.G. & Schuh, E.S. (1994). An ethnic bias in scientific citations. European Journal of Social Psychology, Vol. 24,623439
- Hosbawn, E. (1995). The era of extremes: the brief twentieth century - 1914-1991. SP: Companhia das Letras.
- Kant, I. (1992). Answer to the question: what is Enlightenment? In: Perpetual peace and other pamphlets. Lisbon: 70.
- Kundera, M. (1995). The slowness. RJ: Nova Fronteira.
- Lasch, C. (1987). The minimum I: psychic survival in difficult times. SP: Brasiliense.
- Legault, L. & Green-Demers, I. & Eadie, A. L. (2009). Motivation and Emotion Vol. 33, Iss. 1, (Mar 2009): 10-24.
- Marcuse, H. (1972). Authority and family study. In: Ideas about a critical theory of society. RJ: Zahar.
- Swan, M. (1978). Spectrum. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.