

## Introduction

Understanding of conflict between groups - complex, interdisciplinary endeavour. Implications for suffering, justice, fulfilment.

Factors including geography, history, economic, politics all have an influence, but the focus of chapter is on the social psychological contribution to understanding of this topic.

- Cognitive social accounts
- Realistic conflict theory
- Social identity theory
- Social constructionist accounts

All have the potential to clarify how conflict between groups becomes part of our individual motivations, emotions, cognitions and actions - and then how SP factors shape broader relationships between groups.

SP research can be evaluated by how well it informs social policies which promote reform.

The most influential SP framework for conflict reduction has been the contact hypothesis - which is critiqued.

## SP perspectives on prejudice and conflict

### Early research - the 'prejudiced personality'

Pre WWII - psychology suggested causes of ethnic/racial tensions were in engrained biological and cultural differences, which caused particular reactions in individuals.

Post WWII - focus shifted to how irrational thoughts based on faulty generalisations contributed to racial hatred, violence and genocide - e.g. **Allport's** definition of the prejudiced mind.

## SPM Chapter 6 - Prejudice, conflict and conflict reduction

Prejudice = a result of abnormal psychological development. For example, aberrationist accounts include:

**Adorno et al (1950)** - 'Authoritarian Personality' study - individual with repressed resentment towards traditional authority. Unconscious anger irrationally projected onto scapegoat groups. (psychodynamic influences).

**Rokeach et al (1960)** - 'Dogmatic Personality' study - prejudice as a result of cognitive rigidity: a deep rooted inability to cope with ambiguity. Things are good or bad, black or white etc. Experimental work (**Fisher, 1951**) - on the truncated pyramid found highly prejudiced people were almost twice as likely (62% vs 34%) to draw an asymmetrical truncated pyramid seen four weeks earlier as symmetrical.

These people are 'rotten apples' (**Henriques, 1984**). Comforting accounts - as authoritarians (Nazis, KKK etc) are amongst us, but are not of us. Later research (1970s onwards) challenges this view:

### 'Faulty cognitions' - socio-cognitive perspectives

Highly influential concepts, metaphors and methods on the psychology of intergroup relations - seen in 'information processing' models of the person, which dominates current research into prejudice. The study of 'errors' and 'biases' underlie these accounts.

Cognitive miser stereotyping theory - **Fiske and Taylor, 1991**. The world is complicated, so we classify and attribute characteristics to people and things. This simplifies the information processing task of storing and retrieving information within the brain and anticipating what is likely to happen. It 'frees up' our limited cognitive resources to enable us to operate normally, rather than being perpetually bogged down in processing detail. Evidence exists to show a possible

link between stereotyping and cognitive capacity - e.g. **Crisp et al, McCrae et al**.

=> stereotyping is not abnormal - but is part of everyday cognition. A by-product is that it emphasises inter-category differences (outgroup) and minimises intra-category differences (ingroup) - the 'accentuation principle'.

If these processes are a fundamental part of our cognitive architecture => categories and stereotypes are difficult to alter, as applied automatically and unreflexively - 'implicit prejudice'. Research on this area has been argued to be one of the most important developments in the SP of intergroup processes - e.g. **Banaji, 1997** - argues that the unsettling discovery of implicit prejudice shows that well-intentioned people express stereotypes and prejudice previously thought to only be found in explicitly prejudiced others.

Researchers have used methods to differentiate between explicit and implicit prejudice - e.g. by using **Pettigrew and Meertens** 'blatant prejudice scale'.

Q: Immigrants come from less able races and this explains why they are not as well off as most British people - strongly agree/somewhat agree/somewhat disagree/strongly disagree

USA/European evidence based on such surveys indicates a sharp decrease in explicit prejudice over the last 50 years. However, **Dovidio and Gaertner** argue that prejudice is still there - but that it has mutated into more subtle forms of expression.

Example 'implicit prejudice' experiment - **Fazio et al**

White u/gs shown random series of white/black faces, followed by a stimulus word. Participants asked to classify word as +ve or -ve. Analysis showed inhibitory and facilitation effects for black and white faces - i.e. slower reaction times for +ve words and faster reaction times for -ve words when preceded by a black face c.f. a white face.

<p>However, result can be argued to be divorced from real-world scenarios. But, further evidence showing high scores on implicit prejudice measures also act in ways more obviously connected to prejudice.</p> <p>e.g. <b>Hughenberg and Bodenhausen (2003)</b> - link between implicit prejudice and perceptions of facial threat. White/black faces morphed from angry to happy. Participants scoring high in implicit prejudice viewed anger as lingering longer on black faces than those scoring low on implicit prejudice.</p> <p><u>Aversive racism theory</u> - <b>Dovidio and Gaertner</b> - aversive racists consciously sympathise with victims of historical injustice, supporting racial equality. They also hold a negative set of attitudes which are expressed 'rationally' when involuntarily elicited as in the two experiments above. The two sets of attitudes are dissociated from each other. Aversive racists have a stratified response to others - a surface of tolerance with a non-conscious attitude of intolerance - they are not consciously hiding a 'true' attitude to racism.</p> <p><u>Group based approaches</u></p> <p>Required to explain collective dynamics of relationships between groups and the psychological processes involved.</p> <p><b>Hunter, Stringer and Watson</b> - groups of NI Catholics and Protestants shown news footage of Stone shooting Catholic mourners at Milltown and the British soldiers killed at Andersontown at the subsequent funeral of one of the mourners. Participants asked to explain what had happened and why.</p> <p>Two types of explanation - internal (personal qualities of those involved) and external (e.g. retaliation for prior attacks) attributions of causality. What explanations were used depended on if it was the ingroup or outgroup involved in the violence.</p> <p>Internal, negative attributions made for outgroup violence; external, negative attributions made for</p>	<p>ingroup violence.</p> <p>=&gt; explains the sustenance of a cycle of violence =&gt; not unique to NI - <b>Pettigrew</b> - similar findings where similar conflicts have arisen.</p> <p>Findings of <b>Hunter et al</b> are striking due to the attributions of the two groups being a mirror image of each other.</p> <p>Unlikely, therefore, that there is a 'sectarian' personality type - other psychological processes must be at work - e.g. social identity.</p> <p>Also unlikely that an 'information processing' account can totally explain the findings - why would such a pattern of collectively shared, ethnocentric attributions arise from a need for cognitive economy?</p> <p>Such attributions therefore appear to reflect a broader organisation and ideology of intergroup relations.</p> <p><u>Sherif and Tajfel</u></p> <p><b>Sherif</b> - 'boys camp' experiments of the 1950s/60s.</p> <p>'negative goal interdependence' established between rival groups - zero-sum games. As predicted, such activities raise ingroup solidarity and created outgroup prejudice, often resulting in an undercurrent of violence.</p> <p>Only altered when he intervened to establish a 'positive goal interdependence' culture - i.e. mutual co-operation required to achieve goals.</p> <p>Does reflect some situations where prejudice derived from material conflict is seen - e.g. factory work teams in direct competition with each other (<b>Brown</b>) and US white on black murder rates highest where competition for jobs is highest between racial groups (<b>Jacobs and Woods</b>). Sheds light on the NI study - e.g. this pattern is a 'rational' response of a group where collective interests are organised on sectarian lines.</p>	<p>Prejudice is not seen as an irrational form of bias. Instead, this <u>realistic conflict perspective</u> argues prejudice is a way of furthering the objective goals of parties in conflict.</p> <p><b>Tajfel</b> and others - this is still not enough to explain the historical patterns or SP of intergroup conflict.</p> <p><u>Social identity theory</u> - people define themselves w.r.t. their identification with social groups. This process is central to understanding intergroup relations.</p> <p>Our sense of self comes from our membership of social categories (race, class, community ...). We internalise the defining stereotypes of the categories we take on. In any given context, <u>our social identity is formed relationally</u> - i.e. the NI 'Catholic' identity acquires meaning when contrasted with a 'Protestant' identity.</p> <p>The process of social comparison is emotional - not just an intellectual weighing of information. We form concepts of 'us' and 'them' - leading to depersonalisation (e.g. <b>Cairns et al</b> discusses intergroup conflict in NI in these terms).</p> <p>=&gt; Objective competition for resources is sufficient, <u>but not necessary</u> for intergroup conflict to emerge.</p> <p><b>Hewstone and Greenland</b> - 'pointless' conflicts become more understandable when viewed as a way of maintaining a cherished social identity.</p> <p>But - if a positive group identity is a universal need, surely SIT reduces collective behaviour to individual psychology!</p> <p><u>'Serviceable others' - the discursive construction and legitimisation of conflict</u></p> <p><b>Eidelson and Eidelson</b> - that 'collective belief systems' shape relations and conflict between groups is a key concept.</p>
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How are shared explanations (often conflicting with those of other groups) manufactured - e.g. those present in the Milltown/Andersontown accounts?

**Discursive perspective** - language is a precondition for much of SP (**Potter and Wetherell**). Linguistic resources shape our psychological lives profoundly and enable us to make sense of the social world. For example, they hold the higher-order reasoning processes featuring in much SP work on prejudice and conflict. We “construct” jointly the meaning of social relations and identities.

DP - accounts of social reality are not mere reflections of a given state of affairs, but are active constructions which service social and political functions.

e.g. **Kerr** - accounts of DUP and a former Republican prisoner as to why politically inspired violence occurs in NI. Both accounts acknowledge that it occurs and is perpetrated by both communities. But very different, rhetorically opposed accounts are offered.

Nicholl (DUP) - attributes primary responsibility for ‘the troubles’ to the IRA. He selectively emphasises Enniskillen and La Mon as acts of brutality; protestant violence is constructed as a regrettable but necessary reaction to these events - a defensive step that has saved lives.

MacNiallais (Republican) - defines protestant violence as an active form of right wing aggression that is state-sponsored, terrorising and murdering Catholics indiscriminately to maintain the status quo. IRA activity is positive - a radical revolutionary struggle against the system which oppresses the nationalist community.

These accounts can therefore be seen as legitimising some forms of collective violence and de-legitimising others. A moral hierarchy of violence is created - some forms are more acceptable than others.

Such accounts are being repeated and relayed in

everyday conversation in NI too - part of a ‘longer conversation’ (**Wetherell**) of sectarian ideology.

**Objection to DP** - is that it ignores the inner world of cognition and emotion - a traditional focus for psychology. It is ‘all talk’.

Edwards and Potter counter that DP re-specifies and enriches the psychological domain, rather than ignoring it.

Psychological processes happen in the public domain and are not mysterious happenings ‘in the head’. People have to use a shared ‘psychological thesaurus’ - e.g. the comparison made by MacNiallais between SA death squads and loyalist violence in NI.

DP does not treat categorisation as something which is a cognitive, “bureaucratically efficient (**Billig**)” process, that biases our perceptions of others. Instead, categories are also rhetorical and political resources too. **Reicher and Hopkins** - our ways of classifying others also service collective interests - e.g. ‘asylum seekers’, ‘terrorists’, ‘freedom-fighters’, ‘suicide bombers’ ... as a way of constantly drawing boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

### SP perspectives on conflict reduction

**Reicher** - it is easy to misread history as suggesting that conflict between groups is universal and an immutable process. This position is invalid as it overlooks societies characterised by solidarity between groups and where relations are changing for the better. It is reactionary as it encourages us to passively accept conflict as inevitable. He argues prejudice is not a ‘natural’ consequence of cognition and human motivation.

Raises questions about SPs role in promoting social change - historically, much intergroup relations work split between scholarship and advocacy - seen in the ‘crisis’ about the lack of relevance of SP experimentation.

## The SP of contact and desegregation

### The paradox of contact

**Allport (1954)** - our interactions with others may either increase or decrease our prejudice towards them.

More recent studies of race attitudes in the UK found the more multiracial the composition of a city, the more negative the inhabitants’ racial attitudes (**Lemos, 2005**). A diverse environment does not imply the embracing of diversity.

### When and why does contact reduce prejudice?

Possible to construct a ‘laundry list’ of factors from psychological research that conclude contact reduces prejudice when:

- It is regular and frequent
- Occur between people of the same status
- A balanced ratio of ingroup to outgroup is present
- There is genuine ‘acquaintance potential’
- It is competition free
- It involves meeting a counter-stereotypical outgroup member
- Is organised around achieving ‘superordinate goals’
- Is normatively and institutionally supported

However - **Pettigrew** points out that such a list does not explain why contact works!

Early research attributes it to ‘education’ - interaction overcoming ignorance, allowing similarities to be discovered.

**Brewer and Miller (1984)** - works best in contexts where group differences de-emphasised - the ‘decategorisation model of contact’ - so we get to know others as individuals, not as representatives of

social categories. We then start to attend to information which replaces category identity as the most useful basis of classification of others.

However, Hewstone and Brown - argues this misinterprets implications of SIT for understanding contact. It is unrealistic to expect group members to suppress their collective identities in this way (e.g. Hajib wearing in France). SIT => our group membership is central to our own sense of self.

They therefore argue that successful contact must be an intergroup process - where participants do think of each other as representatives of particular social categories - 'the pluralist model of contact'. Leads to a policy of multiculturalism - institutional reforms favouring mutual differentiation. E.g. in schools - children being invited to learn about and celebrate religious practices of other communities and their differences to their own.

Gaertner and Dovidio's (2000) 'recategorisation model of contact' suggests realignment of boundaries between groups is possible, if breaking down barriers is not. Does not attempt to reduce the importance of group identification but tries to shift group boundaries to promote greater inclusiveness. Some evidence from experiments it may work in some contexts (**Gaertner et al**) - but where intergroup conflict has a long pedigree resurgence of sub-group identities is a constant threat to success (**Brewer**).

#### Some limits of the contact hypothesis

CH is a blueprint for social change which has at its core the idea that prejudiced individuals can be rehabilitated. **Brewer and Brown** argue it is one of the most successful ideas of SP; **Dovidio et al** - argued it was one of the most effective strategies for improving intergroup relations.

But, even so, critiques of CH exist.

Cantle report into race riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001 observed that there was a vast depth of polarisation between ethnic communities - and that these communities lived parallel lives. It recommended:

(i) Cross-cultural contact at all levels to break down barriers.

(ii) Controversially, the creation of a common sense of national identity and local citizenship, as it observed that many white residents looked back at a 'golden age' of a monocultural British society and immigrant communities looked back at their 'country of origin' for their sense of identity.

Is the CH too idealistic? - much psychological literature searches for 'optimal' conditions for intergroup contact. It is in danger of producing knowledge that masks the starker realities of contact between groups and failing to explain how to establish such 'optimal' conditions in everyday life - **Dixon et al, 2005**.

Can interpersonal contact change intergroup relations and perceptions? - CH can be criticised as it focuses on 'theoretical individualism'. Much research suggests effects of contact on interpersonal perceptions may not generalise to intergroup perceptions. Contact may lead people to regard outgroup individuals as 'exceptions to the rule' - rather than the abandonment of wider stereotypes.

A related criticism is what if the processes that govern conflict between groups are (largely) separate from those that govern individual interactions? If this is so, it is a fundamental problem and criticism of the CH.

#### Towards a discursive analysis of contact and desegregation

**Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins (2006)** - investigated perceptions of interventions designed to encourage integration with non-Muslims by British Muslims.

Found:

Muslims' constructions of 'contact' and 'integration' have to be viewed in the context of historical change. Discrimination over the last 20 years has become organised along religious rather than racial lines - 'Islamophobia'.

In line with CH, some Muslims view integration as key to the battle against Islamophobia. However, others define Islamophobia as reflecting the struggle between baqq (truth) and batil (falsehood) - so contact would subvert the Muslim identity.

This research suggests that communities hold contradictory theories of contact - not readily amenable to the analytic categories of traditional contact research. It therefore has implications for the success of interventions designed to promote intergroup interactions.

#### Summary

Dominant approach to conflict resolution has been CH - to identify optimal conditions for contact. But:

- The list of factors does not explain why it works
- The list is in danger of making the CH irrelevant as it is too idealistic
- DP suggests how the meaning of 'contact' and 'integration' need to be viewed in context

#### Conclusions

The focus on prejudice and conflict as a result of 'errors' and 'biases' in cognition is problematic. e.g. - **Wetherell and Potter** argue that it:

- Entrenches an individualistic perspective on social change - processes which occur 'under the skull' rather than in context in society.

Recent research on aversive racism and implicit prejudice actually reinforces this individualistic approach.

DP offers insights into how collective practices used by communities to define and treat others may be approached, rather than simply the cognitive and emotional reactions of individuals.

Collective practices generate shared constructions of social reality that are more complicated, subtle and contradictory than can be investigated using simple measures of prejudice - they are not 'faulty' cognitions.

Violent conflict is usually justified in terms of positive moral values - justice, rights, community, peace. SP therefore needs to focus on transforming discursive frameworks that sustain collective violence, entrench a shared sense of entitlement and positions that lead dominant groups to defend their privileges.

Conflict is two-sided - the Chinese symbol for conflict captures this by signifying opportunity and struggle together.

Conflict can be positive - it helps to disrupt social inequalities - a point central to SIT. It can be transformative - promoting a fairer distribution of resources. It may allow people to forge a more positive sense of collective identity and values.

Such insights therefore question the tendency of SP to treat conflict as a regressive phenomenon that always needs to be reduced.

