

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO RACISM: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW TO THE STUDY OF RACISM

Although during the last few years there has been a series of theoretical analyses in social sciences on the issue of racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986), Duckitt's (1992) historical overview is one of the most interesting and comprehensive. According to this author, social theorists have approached racism from different perspectives. He distinguished six different periods in the social-psychological analysis of racism:

The social scientists who worked during the first period (....-1920s, termed as the "race psychology period") assumed, following a social-darwinist perspective, that ethnic groups could be placed along a natural evolutive hierarchy. The most developed groups (whites) were at the top of the hierarchy and the less developed groups (blacks, hispanics, females, etc) at the bottom of the hierarchy. The hierarchization was the obvious result of natural selection forces. Thus, people who supported White superiority over other groups were not regarded as prejudiced. The superiority of white was an "empirical fact".

This period was followed by the "racial prejudice phase" (1920s-1930s). The new social atmosphere (emergence of anti-colonial movements, the increasing number of Jewish social scientists, etc.) led to a largely extended criticism of the racial domination theses. Racism was regarded as irrational and unjustified attitudes. The dominant methodological approach to racism was descriptive (i.e. Katz & Braly's research on stereotypes).

The 1940's was the era when the first systematic attempts to conceptualize prejudice was undergone. Psychodynamic approaches dominated this period. Racism was seen as the result of defense mechanisms through which internal conflicts were resolved. The origins of racism were based on psychopathology and unsolved intrapsychic conflicts. These approaches offered a deeply individualistic analysis of prejudice and racism. The final solution to prejudice and racism was psychotherapy. The Scapegoat theory (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer & Sears, 1939; Krebs & Miller, 1985; Leyens, Yzerbyt &

Schadron, 1994) exemplifies the attempts to integrate the psychodynamic perspective and behavioral traditions in order to explain aggression towards certain individuals and groups. According to this theory, frustration (viewed as the interruption or impossibility to obtain certain desired goals) is the primary cause of aggression. Sometimes aggression is displaced towards groups which are different from those that have provoked the frustration. As frustration builds up, and aggression cannot be expressed towards its sources, a substitute or scapegoat for the source will be found. For example, frustration and fear provoked by a negative economic situation and the risk of unemployment could be displaced towards immigrants playing the role of a scapegoat.

The fifties was dominated by the Authoritarian Personality approach developed by Adorno et al. (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson y Sanford, 1950). Their analysis was also based on displacement mechanisms. According these authors, prejudice and aggression towards certain social groups was the result of defensive mechanisms triggered in order to protect oneself against unacceptable tendencies which were in this way kept away from conscience. Aggressive unacceptable feelings activated by certain figures (parents, ingroup leaders, etc.) are displaced towards substitute targets (immigrants, etc.). As in the previous period, the analysis of racism and prejudice was individualistic and the solution was based on psychotherapy.

The relevance of social factors in the study of prejudice was claimed during the sixties and the seventies. This was the "Culture and Society" period (Duckitt, 1992). In the sixties racism was regarded as a "social norm". As such it was internalized through the socialization process by the members of society. Thus, there were racist societies. Different authors analyzed how prejudice was transmitted. This interest in culture has been more recently re-emphasized by cross-cultural psychologists. The seminal study carried out by Hofstede (1984) classified all cultures according to four dimensions: Power Distance (High versus Low); Uncertainty Avoidance; Individualism; and Masculinity. He defined (Hofstede, 1984, p. 21) Culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one human group from another... includes systems of values, and values are among the building blocks of culture". What is the implication of Hofstede's taxonomy for the study of prejudice?. According to this approach, for instance, High masculine countries are more sexist; High individualistic countries are characterized by "more press freedom" , "protest potential" (versus repression potential), "greater economic development", "greater social mobility", "identity based on the individual" (versus based on the group), "value standards should apply to all, universalism" (versus particularism or different value standards for the ingroup and outgroups). Moreover, High Uncertainty Avoidance Countries have less tolerance towards deviant people and ideas, are more conservative (emphasizing law and order), stronger nationalist feelings. Finally, Countries higher in Power Distance are more politically polarized (strong left and right wing parties with a weak center), dominance of ideologies which stress power polarization, political power concentrated in hands of an oligarchy, less national wealth, more static, less questioning of authorities, etc. In general Western countries were classified as Low in Power Distance, Low in Uncertainty Avoidance, High in Individualism, and High in Masculinity. In other words, non-Western societies were seen as more prejudice-prone. Recently, many authors have selected the Individualism-Collectivism dimension in their cross-cultural studies (Kim, Triandis, Kciticibasi, Choi & Young, 1994; Kagitcibaci & Berry, 1989). These same

authors have stated that given the stronger importance of the group in their self definition, collectivist countries are more prone to prejudice towards all kind of outgroup (Kim, 1994). However, many of these theses have been recently questioned, such as those stressing the links between individualism, achievement motivation and economic growth (McClelland in Weiner, 1988) or those stressing the relations between collectivism and prejudice (Kagitcibasi & Berry, 1989). Moreover, let us not forget that strong modern forms of racism (K.K.K., Nazism, etc.) have been developed in Western countries (more individualistic ones).

The central role played by intergroup conflicts in the origins of prejudice was claimed during the seventies. Prejudice was regarded as the "expression of group interests" (Duckitt, 1992). This is a well known period dominated by intergroup theories such as the Realistic Conflict Theory (Sherif et al., 1961) or Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1981, 1982).

From the 1980's onwards Social Cognition has dominated the study of prejudice. Prejudice and Racism have been regarded as the "normal", "natural" consequence of human cognitive processes. Human thinking was dissected into its components (attention, perception, information storage, retrieval, etc.) and several models based on these different components were proposed: Illusory Correlation, complexity of group cognitive representations; models based on biased attributional patterns; dominance of categories in social perception, etc (for an extensive overview see Echebarría, Gonzalez, Garagordibil & Villarreal, 1995; Zanna & Olson, 1994; Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1994; Mackie & Hamilton, 1993). Psychosocial interventions are based on changing stereotypes through intergroup contact ("Contact Hypothesis"), the disappearance of stereotypes through disconfirming information, etc. As in the forties, fifties, and the seventies (see the criticism on the issue of SIT's individualism that is based on the "self-esteem" hypothesis), the current study of prejudice is dominated by a deeply individualistic perspective. As a result, most of the psycho-social interventions are focused on changing "individual minds".

SOME OF THE CURRENT DOMINANT APPROACHES TO RACISM

The study of this particular kind of prejudice that is racism is increasingly attracting the interest of social psychologists. As a result, a variety of new concepts (Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993) such as "aversive racism" (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), modern racism (McConahay, 1986), subtle racism (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) or symbolic racism (Sears, 1988) have recently appeared. Although each concept is different, there are also important communalities among all these approaches. All of them represent individualistic approaches to racism. Racism is seen as the result of internal conflicts (usually conflicts due to contradictory values). Racism is a sort of "defensive mechanism" aimed towards solve these conflicts. These theories could be regarded as a revival of the dominant theories of the forties and the fifties without the psychoanalytic assumptions. We will present a sort overview of these models in order to exemplify our statement.

McConahay (1986, p. 93) developed the concept of "Modern Racism" (McConahay, 1986; Katz, Wackenhut & Hass, 1986). The contents of Modern racism are characterized by (a) the belief that there is no discrimination nowadays; (b) prejudiced group members

are pushing too hard, too fast and into places where they are not wanted; (c) their tactics and demands are unfair; (d) their recent gains are undeserved and their prestige is granted; (e) institutions have given them more attention and concomitant status than they deserve. Modern racists say that racism is bad but, at the same time, they believe that these six statements are "empirical facts".

The concept of "Symbolic Racism" (Sears, 1988, p.56) is close to that defined by McConahay. Symbolic racism is "a blend of antiblack affect and the kind of traditional American moral values embodied in the Protestant Ethic... [is] a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo based on the moral feeling that blacks (or other groups) violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, work ethic, obedience, and discipline". The content of symbolic racism is characterized by (a) an antagonism towards discriminated groups that are seen as "pushing too hard" and moving too fast especially through the use of violence; (b) resentment towards special favors for discriminated groups (such as in "reverse discrimination", racial quotas in jobs and education; welfare access, etc.)and (c) the denial of continuing discrimination.

"Aversive racism" (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986, p. 62) is another concept. The aversive racists feel compassion, sympathize with the victims of injustice, support public policies aimed towards promoting racial equality and regard themselves as nonprejudiced and nondiscriminatory people, but "almost unavoidably possess negative feelings and beliefs" about certain ethnic groups. As in other approaches, the origin of this racism is based on psychological processes. On the one hand, aversive racists see themselves as tolerant, equalitarian and non-racist (values positively perceived in current society), but on the other hand they have negative feelings towards certain groups. These subjects avoid relationships with prejudiced groups. Racism is expressed in ambiguous situations, situations in which there are no clear-cut norms or they conflict among themselves.

In the same direction, Katz, Wackenhut and Hass (1986) have developed the concept of Racial Ambivalence. According to them, racial prejudice is characterized by an ambivalent feeling of sympathy and rejection. Members of discriminated groups are seen as victims of their social environment but also as "deviate" subjects (they are seen as possessing personal characteristics which are in contradiction with socially valued norms and values). This racial ambivalence leads to unstable behavioral patterns towards prejudiced group members. These behaviors could be positive or negative depending on situational factors. Katz labeled this as the *ambivalence-amplification* process. Ambivalence produces a high vulnerability and emotional tension in a context of interaction with prejudiced subjects. The origin of this racial ambivalence lies in the conflict between two value systems: egalitarian values (which embraces democratic and humanitarian precepts) and Individualism (with an emphasis on personal freedom, self reliance, devotion to work and achievements).

These individualistic approaches have been extended to the study of other types of prejudice such as sexism. Thus, for example, Glick and Fiske (1996) will talk about the Benevolent sexism. DelBoca, Ashmore and McManus (1986, p.p. 143-144) have coined the term "Symbolic Sexism". Or Tougas, Brown, Beaton and Joly (1995), as well as Kathryn, Aikin, Hall and Hunter (1995) have applied McConahay's (1986) Modern Racism scale to the analysis of modern forms of sexism.

These approaches have led to the development of individualistic tactics in order to cope with racism. For example, Monteith (1993, 1996a, 1996b; Devine & Monteith,

1993) has developed a procedure of self-regulation of prejudiced responses. In short, this procedure is based on prejudice-related discrepancies. Conflict takes place between the personal standards (shoulds) ("we shouldn't be racist") and actual behaviors (woulds) (racist behaviors, over-learned behaviours automatically activated by stereotypes). This discrepancy or conflict triggers off feelings of discomfort, shame and self-criticism. These feelings act as punishments for racist behaviors. Monteith used this process in order to inhibit automatic racist behaviours and to establish alternative non-racist behaviours.

Jones (1988) distinguished between three different levels of racism: Individual, Institutional and Cultural. These dominant theories focus only on the individual level. However, as Jones said, institutional and cultural racism is more complicated and more pernicious than individual racism. Mere intervention on an individual level has proved to be not efficient. Moreover, scientific knowledge (and psychosocial theories) have ideological consequences (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994). To the extent in which social psychologists predominantly underline the importance of individual and intrapsychic causes in explaining racism, they omit or under-estimate the relevance of social and institutional factors. Thus they contribute to offer an explanation according to which the need for social and institutional changes in order to cope with racism are obscured and the racial status quo is maintained.

Moreover, implicitly these models assume that intervention on psychological level (changing individual's attitudes and values) will lead to changes in prejudice behaviours. This assumption was termed by Hosftede (1984, p. 19) as the "positivistic fallacy" that consists on trying to relate values to behavior: "values should never be evaluated with deeds, for the simple reason that [racist] behaviour depends on both the person and the situation". In other words, racist behaviors depend on ideological and institutional factors.

TOWARDS A SOCIAL RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF PREJUDICE AND RACISM

The main goal of the present section is to firmly stress in favour of a social approach to prejudice which takes into account power and regards racism as social ideological discourses developed by groups in order to justify inequalities in the distribution of social resources (economic, social, political, cultural, etc.), inequalities in the racial status quo, and the exclusion of certain social groups.

Theories developed by social psychologists are not politically neutral. Gramsci stated that through the process of legitimation, ideologies constructed by dominant institutions and their ideologists (scientists in general, philosophers, sociologists, etc.) became part of folk knowledges. Moscovici, (1961/76) has shown how psychological theories, through their diffusion in a society, became part of the common sense knowledge of social representation. To the extent in which psychological theories have become "dominant representations", they are used by lay people to render meaning to their social environment. As Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (1994, p. 3) stated "scientific knowledge (here social psychological theories about racism and prejudice) is a social creation serving the purposes of society's dominant institutions". These authors analyzed several influent

theories developed by social scientists (Hume, Malthus, Spencer, Jensen, Eysenck, McDougall, Ross, etc) and have shown their implications in terms of support racism.

Theories (such as those which are becoming "dominant" in the nineties) which over-emphasize the intra-psychic origins of prejudice and racism and under-evaluate the importance of socio-institutional factors are contributing to build a ideological discourse or dominant representation which blames individuals, justifies status quo (existing dominant intergroup relationships), and excludes the need for institutional changes.

There are many social psychologists that, from different theoretical perspectives, have stressed the importance of the ideological aspects in the origins of racism and prejudice. Thus, Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 13) have assumed some of the marxist's theses proposed by Robert Miles such as his analysis of ideology regarded as a distortion of social reality which reflects economic and political structures and also shapes those structures. They (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 3) have proposed to include the study of racist discourse within the study of *ideology* in general. They defined racism as "discourse (of whatever content) which has the effect of establishing, substantiating and reinforcing oppressive power relations.... has the effect of categorizing, allocating and discriminating between certain groups.... justifies, sustains and legitimates those practices which maintain the power and dominance" (p. 70). As Howitt & Owusu-Bempah (1994, p. 10) stated, "racism not only justifies power relations between people but also stipulates the detail of the relationship between racial groups".

From this perspective, prejudice and racism fulfils some important ideological roles. Following Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 201), racist discourses, "can draw attention away from immediate social reforms... it can provide a logic and method for justifying individual conduct".

Furthermore, Racism not only justifies dominant relationships and the exclusion of certain social groups, but also articulates nationalistic feelings, anti-immigration policies and cultural differentiation (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994).

Using a experimental methodology, Echebarria and Gonzalez (1996) have shown that prejudice (here xenophobia) could be seen as dynamic social discourses used by groups to justify restrictive immigration policies. They have shown that the number of people who support xenophobic discourses increases in a political context in which people anticipate that their political representatives will propose more restrictive policies against immigrants arriving from "poor" countries. This research exemplifies a social orientation in the study of prejudice. To the extent in which prejudice in general, and racism and xenophobia in particular, are regarded as ideological discourses developed by a group in order to justify their discriminative behaviour, it is important to study those social factors which increase or decrease the support towards these discourses. The emphasis is not placed on individuals, but on social and institutional factors.

From this point of view, racism is rooted in the social and structural rather than in the personal and psychological (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 217). The history of racism is in part intertwined with the history of *Colonization*. The Ideology of Black inferiority and White superiority aided the exploitation of certain countries by others, the economic development of European countries through slavery (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 22; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1994). Foucault (1992) stated the origin of racism in the establishment of the modern State.

In a similar vein, Van Dijk (1989, p. 116) defined racism as a social representation, as "a negative social representation of ethnic minority groups shared by members of the dominant group... is acquired, used or changed in social situations, and has a function of structure of social dominance". These representations include general and abstract group representations (shared group representations explain consensus, continuity, and coherence in prejudiced actions performed by dominant groups) and ethnic situational models (models organized in a fixed schema consisting of categories people use to analyze and understand social situations, i.e. time, location, circumstances, participants and events). General group prejudice is tailored to concrete personal situations through such models.

But emphasis on the ideological functions of racism and prejudice is not restricted to those authors who are close to a social constructivist perspective. Bobo (1988), who's ideas run along Sherif's theses, also assumes this approach. He is also influenced by marxism, taking the concept of Hegemonic Ideology from Gramsci. This concept is close to Moscovici's (1988) concept of "collective representation". An ideology is hegemonic when the representations developed by dominant groups are dominant and largely shared in a cultural and institutional milieu. These ideologies serve to justify the existing status quo and the privileged position held by the dominant group. Racism is the result of social inequalities and ethnocentrism.

Finally, from a perspective which emphasizes the social nature and function of racism and regards racism as an ideological discourse developed by dominant groups in order to justify their privileged status and the exclusion of other groups, it is important to study the process of diffusion of these discourses through the mass media. Moscovici (1961/76) stated the importance of analyzing the role of mass media in the study of social representations. However, for many years this aspect has been pushed into oblivion. Recently, using an experimental procedure (the priming paradigm), Echebarría and Gonzalez (unpublished) shown how the media's emphasis on some topics (i.e. importance of nationalism or regional distinctiveness) could increase ulterior support for xenophobic ideas. The theses on which the study was based could be summarized as follows: In everyday life, there are many sources of priming. One of the most important ones is mass media. The agenda setting hypothesis states that mass media grant salience to some aspects of the social life. They establish which are the most important topics and create a certain social climate (Roberts & Bachen, 1981; Liebert & Schwartzberg, 1977). Iyengar and Kinder (1987, p. 21) found little "spillover" in agenda setting. These effects were quite specific not drawing the viewers's attention to other related problems. Contrary to this perspective, we believe that mass media (in our case newspapers), through the process of priming, could affect xenophobia and social attitudes towards certain social groups. The mass media could be seen as indirectly responsible for raising or reducing social prejudice, depending of what kind of social topics they underline. For example, the repetitive exposition in the mass media of problems linked to unemployment, street robberies and violence, etc. could activate or prime feelings of fear which could subsequently influence attitudes towards other social groups, such as immigrants. We hypothesized that the fluctuation in xenophobia and prejudice towards immigrants could be partly explained in terms of displacement towards these groups of certain fears and problems which, in their origin, are not directly associated with immigrants. Mass media may sometimes be the channel through which certain problems

are underlined, amplified, or sometimes created. In this study we analyzed the extent to which xenophobia is raised or reduced as a result of the kind of social news underlined by the media (specifically newspapers).

We hypothesized that when the newspapers stressed some social problems that indirectly could be linked with immigration, xenophobic attitudes could emerge although immigrants were not overtly quoted in the newspapers' articles. The opposite could also be true: When newspapers stress the beneficial effects of inter-ethnic relationship, xenophobia could later on be reduced.

The sample was composed of 119 undergraduated psychology students. 80 (67.2%) were women and 39 (32.8%) men. Mean age average was 19 years. The experimental design was carried out in two phases.

(A) Priming phase. The experimental subjects were first year social psychology students taking part in a normal lecture aimed towards learning how to establish the reliability and validity of attitude scales. After having learned basic theoretical concepts they were prepared to take part in a practical class. Once inside the classroom, the lecturer told them that they would use their own answers to a questionnaire as raw data. When the lecturer was ready to distribute the questionnaire, two young men entered the classroom. After talking to the lecturer they introduced themselves as journalism doctoral students undergoing their Phd. research on the opinions about mass media. They asked students to help them by answering a short questionnaire. This consisted on a short note taken from a national newspaper. The article was written in such a way that students would believe that it was a real newspaper article (which in fact it was not). An introduction required students to carefully read the content of the note and answer three questions: How important is the content of the note for you?, How credible is the newspaper article for you?, and what is the main topic of the article?. Four different notes were distributed (all of the same length) (each student read one of them and was not aware of the existence of the other versions): (a) the first was (N=31) a study carried out by the regional government's Sociological Bureau concluding that, given the high structural rate of unemployment among young people, graduated university students find it very difficult to get a job. (b) The second (N=32) article was also presented as a research carried out by the same Bureau on people's opinions about what are the most important problems the region will face in the future. Most people thought that the main problem would be the loss of regional identity and culture. (c) The third article (N=27) (also a research from the Sociological Bureau) concluded that the most important problem among young people is the high rate of serious role-conflicts in couples (this was our control or base-rate condition). (d) Finally, the last (N=29) article stressed the results of a multinational research carried out by ethnologists, sociologists and anthropologists in 120 countries. The research, after a historical analysis, concluded that multi-ethnic societies have shown a higher capacity to cope with social problems and a greater creativity. The two journalism students (experimental confederates) collected the questionnaires, thanked the students and left the classroom.

(B) Phase 2. The lecturer continues his class and asks the students to answer a questionnaire on attitudes. The questionnaire consists of 9 statements taken from Echebarria and Gonzalez's (1996) scales about attitudes towards immigrants. Subjects must indicate their agreement with each statement. Subjects were debriefed after collecting

the attitude questionnaires. No students guessed or was suspicious about the relationship between both phases and so all data was introduced into further analyses.

The main results were the following ones. Overall, the effect of the priming manipulation was significant. Two out of three dimensions of Xenophobia (Culture and Frontier) were significantly affected by the manipulation. In all conditions, subjects previously primed with a positive content (adjustment and creativity in multi-ethnic nations) had the lowest scores on xenophobia. Subjects previously exposed to an article related to cultural threat (although without explicitly mentioning immigrants) were those who had the highest scores in the Cultural Xenophobia Dimension. Finally, subjects are more in agreement with the need for reinforcing the frontiers against immigrants after having been exposed to an article referring to unemployment among university students.

As a conclusion, we do not propose a rigid, formal and closed approach (both theoretically and methodologically) to prejudice in general, and racism and xenophobia in particular. Without excluding the influence of psychological and individual factors in the phenomena of prejudice, we believe that social psychology should grant more attention (specially in these kind of topics) to (a) the social and institutional factors which are in the basis of prejudice; (b) the social and ideological function fulfilled by prejudice; and (c) the ideological implications of scientific theories in general (and social-psychological theories of racism in particular). The particularity of social-psychological approaches to racism (in contrast to more individualist psychologists) should be the attention we pay to these social factors. These proposals do not exclude any theoretical or methodological approach. Many of the statements and theses abovementioned could and should be tested using different methodologies.

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