
MODULE 58

Antisocial Relations

Module Preview

Prejudice can be both overt and subtle. As overt prejudice wanes, subtle prejudice lingers. Social barriers and biases are often unconscious. Prejudice arises from social inequalities, social divisions, and emotional scapegoating. Prejudice also has emotional and cognitive roots.

Aggression is a product of nature and nurture. In addition to genetic, neural, and biochemical influences, aversive events heighten people's hostilities. Aggressive behavior is also learned through rewards and by observing role models and media violence.

Module Guide

Prejudice

- ▶ Lecture: Racial Prejudice
- ▶ Exercises: Subtle Prejudice and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory; Positions of Privilege and Institutional Racism; Institutional Discrimination
- ▶ Exercise/Project: Measuring Stereotypes
- ▶ Project: A Personal Cultural History
- ▶ ActivePsych: *Digital Media Archive*, 2nd ed.: *Being Gay: Coming Out in the 21st Century*; *Scientific American Frontiers*, 3rd ed.: *Hidden Prejudice: The Implicit Association Test*
- ▶ Videos: Modules 31 and 32 of *Psychology: The Human Experience: Attitudes and Prejudicial Behavior and Ethnocentrism and Prejudice*
- ▶ Feature Film: *Crash*

58-1. *Identify the three components of prejudice, and contrast overt and subtle forms of prejudice.*

Prejudice is a mixture of *beliefs* (often overgeneralized and called **stereotypes**), *emotions* (hostility, envy, or fear), and predispositions to *action* (to discriminate). Prejudice is a negative attitude; **discrimination** is a negative behavior.

Overt prejudice, such as denying children of a particular racial group the opportunity to attend school, is discrimination that explicitly (openly and consciously) expresses negative beliefs and emotions. Subtle (implicit, automatic) prejudice, such as that reflected in people's facial muscle responses and in the activation of their amygdala to viewing Black and White faces, is an implicit (often unconscious) expression of negative beliefs and emotions. Researchers found that 9 in 10 White respondents took longer to identify pleasant words (such as peace and paradise) as "good" when presented with Black-sounding names rather than White-sounding names. Priming people with a flashed Black face rather than a White face also makes them more likely to misperceive a flashed tool as a gun.

► Exercise: Ingroup Bias

- 58-2. *Discuss the social factors that contribute to prejudice, and explain how scapegoating illustrates the emotional component of prejudice.*

Prejudice often arises as those who enjoy social and economic superiority attempt to justify the status quo by *blaming the victim*. Through our social identities, we also associate ourselves with some groups and contrast ourselves with others. Mentally drawing a circle that defines “us” (the **ingroup**) also excludes “them” (the **outgroup**). Such group identifications promote an **ingroup bias**, that is, a favoring of one’s own group. Even creating an “us-them” distinction by the toss of a coin leads people to show ingroup bias.

Facing the fear of death tends to heighten patriotism and produce loathing and aggression toward those who threaten one’s world. **Scapegoat theory** suggests that prejudice offers an outlet for anger by providing someone to blame. To boost our own sense of status, it also helps to have others to denigrate.

► Exercise: Belief in a Just World

- 58-3. *Cite four ways that cognitive processes help create and maintain prejudice.*

One way we simplify the world is to *form categories*. In categorizing others, we often stereotype them, overestimating the similarity of those within another group. The **other-race effect** (or *own-race bias*) is the tendency to recall faces of one’s own race more accurately than faces of other races. It emerges during infancy, between 3 and 9 months of age. We also estimate the frequency of events by *vivid cases* (violence, for example) that come to mind more readily than the less vivid events involving the same group. Third, impartial observers may blame victims by assuming the world is just and that people therefore get what they deserve and deserve what they get (called the **just-world phenomenon**). Finally, *hindsight bias* may contribute to the tendency to blame the victim.

Aggression

► Lectures: Workplace Violence and the Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression; Genocide

► Exercise: Defining Aggression

► Video: Module 24 of *The Brain* series, 2nd ed.: *Aggression, Violence, and the Brain*

► Instructor Video Tool Kit: *Competition and Aggression*

- 58-4. *Explain how psychology’s definition of aggression differs from everyday usage, and describe various biological influences on aggression.*

In psychology, **aggression** is any physical or verbal behavior intended to hurt or destroy. This definition of aggression has a more precise meaning than it does in everyday usage where an assertive salesperson or a dentist who make us wince with pain may be described as “aggressive.” On the other hand, psychology’s definition recognizes a verbally assaultive person or one who spreads a vicious rumor as aggressive.

Biological influences on aggression operate at the genetic, neural, and biochemical levels. Animals have been bred for aggressiveness, and twin studies suggest that genes also influence human aggression. Animal and human brains have neural systems that, when stimulated, either inhibit or produce aggression. For example, studies of violent criminals have revealed diminished activity in the frontal lobes, which play an important role in controlling impulses. Finally, studies of the effect of hormones (e.g., testosterone), alcohol, and other substances in the blood show that biochemical influences contribute to aggression.

- ▶ Lectures: Relational Aggression in the Media; Do We Need to Vent Our Rage?
- ▶ Videos: Program 25 of *Moving Images: Exploring Psychology Through Film: Social Rejection: The Need to Belong*; Program 18 of *Moving Images: Exploring Psychology Through Film: Venting Anger: The Catharsis Hypothesis*
- ▶ Feature Films: *In Cold Blood*

58-5. *Outline psychological and social-cultural triggers of aggression, noting the relationship between violent video games and aggressive behavior.*

The **frustration-aggression principle** states that the blocking of an attempt to reach some goal creates anger, which can generate aggression, especially in the presence of an aggressive cue such as a gun. Frustration (and aggression) arise less from deprivation than from the gap between reality and expectations. Like frustration, other aversive stimuli, such as physical pain, personal insults, foul odors, cigarette smoke, and hot temperatures, can also evoke hostility.

Our reactions are more likely to be aggressive in situations where experience has taught us that aggression pays. Ostracism or social rejection can also intensify aggression. Different cultures reinforce and evoke different tendencies toward violence. For example, crime rates are higher in countries marked by a great disparity between rich and poor. Social influence also appears in high violence rates among cultures and families that experience minimal father care.

People can learn aggression by observing models who act aggressively, for example, in the family or in the media (watching violence or sexual aggression on TV or in film). When interviewed, Canadian and U.S. sex offenders report a greater-than-usual appetite for sexually explicit and sexually violent materials typically labeled as pornography. Laboratory experiments reveal that repeatedly watching X-rated films makes sexual aggression seem less serious. Media depictions of violence also trigger aggression by providing *social scripts* (mental tapes for how to act provided by our culture).

Playing violent video games can heighten aggressive behavior by providing social scripts and opportunities to observe modeled aggression. Studies have found that playing violent video games increases aggressive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The studies also disconfirm the catharsis hypothesis—the idea that we feel better if we vent our emotions.