
Prejudice and Discrimination on the Basis of Social Dominance Theory

Asli Yayak

Phd, Istanbul University, İstanbul, Turkey

*Corresponding Author:

Asli Yayak

Email: yayakasli@yahoo.com

Abstract: This essay aims to examine the relationship between prejudice and discrimination on the basis of social dominance theory. Discrimination and prejudice are different concepts that many people experience frequently. Identities which create "we" and "other" are based on personal characteristics such as sex, age, sectarian or ethnic origin. Prejudice we feel for "others", are the basis of discrimination. It is defined as a thought coming to mind arising from prejudgements while discrimination is behaviour of this prejudice. The theory of social dominance argues that one or more groups are more dominant and stronger than the others in the social structure and control resources. According to the theory, all social structures are prone to become group-based social layers, all societies are composed of hierarchically organized layers. While dominant social groups shape social values and have material resources or significant social symbols, the disadvantaged groups strive to have them. As a consequence, dominant groups have intention to maintain the circumstance by way of discrimination and favoring the inner group. The theory asserts that group-based social hierarchies emerge through aggregated individual discrimination, aggregated institutional discrimination and behavioral asymmetry. In this process, discriminated individuals, while reducing the values of their social identity by recalling that their groups have low position on the one hand, also make discrimination to be seen as the cause of failure instead of personal reasons.

Keywords: prejudice, discrimination, social dominance theory, social group, group-based hierarchi, dominant group.

INTRODUCTION

Discrimination and prejudice are two concepts which are used instead of each other or confused with each other from time to time. Prejudice can be defined rather as a thought coming to mind arising from prejudgements as its name suggests while discrimination is putting into action this prejudice as a behavior. Much as prejudice and discrimination are observed mostly together, it is also probable to experience one without the presence of the other [1].

Prejudice

Allport [2] has defined prejudice as a "behavior which has changed its direction or a hostile behavior to a person, who is considered to be within a group and thus possesses contestable features attributed to that group, due to only that person's being from that group".

Prejudice has very negative effects on people. Allport [2] states the negative consequences of prejudice on the victim as being subject to social stigmatization, decline in self-esteem, self-respect and being well psychologically, perception of stereotypic threat, feeling of failure and being in a disadvantaged position, uncertainty in interpreting certain situations and violence and genocide.

Prejudice is a sort of protection mechanism developed through groups due to their fear as to possible social changes. Decrease of the group eliteness of the individual or the group's conducting behaviors which are in contrary to the important values leads to social changes. The individual considers his group more positive and the other groups more negative with a view to cope with the said social changes. There will be no social changes if the differences between social groups are perceived as fixed and permanent. However, if these differences are not seen to be permanent, social changes may occur [3].

Discrimination

On the other hand, discrimination, in social psychology, denotes acting on the basis of a prejudice based on factors such as ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, gender, disability status and religion and restricting an individual or group to reach certain resources due to such factors [4].

Discrimination is in a sense favoring a person's his own group. A person's favoring his own group denotes a person's favoring his own group through his feelings, thoughts and behaviors. Such favoring can be conscious or unconscious and can be done through emotions, thoughts and behaviors. However, it reflects rather behaviors and used in terms of

blocking/excluding the opposite group. It has been asserted that favoring has two basic functions as increasing one's self-worth through expression of superiority of one's group and obtaining benefit or superiority for one's group [5].

Discrimination denotes usually behavior to exclude group members who are in a minority and/or low position and to prevent them from using their rights and improving their positions within the community. It is a known fact that people often are treated differently due to their age, gender, religion or ethnicity. The most widespread and apparent type of discrimination is people's being excluded due to their particular features or their being evaluated negatively without considering their behaviors. The implicit type of discrimination takes place by explaining the exclusion basing on a reason; an example of implicit discrimination is to assert that women cannot be senior managers inasmuch as the maternity duties thereof prevent them to travel. Discrimination can be observed more frequently in inter-group conflict situations or when a threat perception emerges [6].

METHOD

Social dominance theory

There are numerous different theories trying to explain the causes of discrimination. The theory of social dominance, as a more hybrid theory among the cited theories, asserts that one or more groups are more dominant and stronger than others in the social structure and control resources. The dominant group which legitimizes the legitimacy thereof by virtue of legitimizing ideologies asserts that what it has is normal -such as appearance, language and behavior- and the ones other than the dominant group have diverted from normal. These dominant groups, which differentiate in each society, create some ideologies in order to justify their own existence and such ideologies are sometimes nationalism, sexism, or ageism [7].

The theory, basing on that all social structures have intention to become group-based social layers, asserts that all the societies consist of hierarchically organized layers [8, 9]. The social form of states, the contents of the basic belief system, or the complexity of socio-economic arrangements, tend to make organizations on a group basis as social hierarchies with at least one group having better social status and power than others. The members of the dominant social group -which often are the members of the majority group- tend to like disproportionate share of positive social values; they intend to enjoy symbolic resources and nice things such as political power, wealth, protection by the power, delicious food, good housing, quality health services, leisure activities and access to education. Negative social values are allocated disproportionately to the secondary group members and force them to have inadequate (substandard) residence, illness, underemployment, risky and unappealing jobs,

disproportionate punishment, stigmatization and being discredited. While the dominant social group shapes social values and has material resources or significant social symbols, the disadvantaged groups strive to have them. The high-status groups desire to maintain the existing hierarchy with an eye to protect the positive social values they have [9]. While the upper groups tend to retain their strengths and resources they have by favoring the inner group and underestimate the outer group, the disadvantaged group members intend to protect the status quo hoping to participate to the dominant group [8, 9]. Thus, according to the theory subgroup members in most cases intend to show a tendency to protect the existence and continuity of the existing hierarchical structure with a view to be a member of the parent group. Although the degree, violence and descriptive foundations of the group-based hierarchical structure change from society to society and change over time in the same society, the group-based hierarchical structure seems to be a humane phenomenon [10].

Social dominance theory is broader than other theories because it tries to integrate the most influential formations with the previous points of view. The theory asserts that the constant economic production in the group-based hierarchy involves three qualitatively different systems: **1) Age system:** In this system, adults have disproportionately social power over the children. According to the age-based social system, older people think that they possess more positive social values and intend to maintain the age-related social hierarchy more [9]. **2) Gender system:** This is the disproportionate system in which men have political, social and military power over women. Men are thought to have more social values than women according to the gender-based social system [9]. **3) Arbitrarily created system:** This is a system which is not based on the human life cycle and which differs in reaching positive and negative social values. Arbitrarily created groups are defined by socially distinguishing marks such as power, nationality, ethnicity, class, position, lineage, religion or group [10]. Sidanius & Pratto [8] state that most of the conflicts between groups arise in arbitrarily formed hierarchies in which objective determinants of belief are not mandatory. Much as the three-dimensional structure is observed in all societies, it varies in different societies dramatically. For example, when women are sentenced to death because of adultery in a country with Shari'a rules, women in Sweden live side by side with men in political and economic fields except the military service. Haphazard categorizations change from society to society and from time to time [11].

The theory established by Sidanius and Pratto [8,9] is based on three basic assumptions: 1- While all societies tend to have hierarchical structures basing on age and sex, arbitrarily constructed social hierarchies are only seen in societies where economics has emerged

as added value. 2- Most conflict types between groups such as sexism, racism, and ethnocentrism show the intention of human beings to group-based social hierarchies. 3- Hierarchical social systems are subject to the effects of powers which increase or decrease group-based social hierarchy.

According to the Social Dominance Theory there are some differences between group-based social hierarchies and individual-based social hierarchies. In individual-based social hierarchies, individuals have the power to possess a certain power, become a person of dignity and authority, become successful politically or academically as a result of individual efforts while in group-based social hierarchies, some powers such as social power, dignity and authority are achieved through the position of the social group in which the individual is member [9]. The theory asserts that group-based social hierarchies emerge through three basic processes: aggregated individual discrimination aggregated institutional discrimination, and behavioral asymmetry [9]. Accordingly, these three processes arise from the legitimization of myths influenced by group identity, social comparison processes and social dominance orientation [12]. While discriminating members of a group in everyday life, simply or sometimes in an insignificant manner just because they are members only of that group is considered as aggregated individual discrimination, application of discrimination through laws and institutions such as hospitals and banks is considered as aggregated institutional discrimination. An example of aggregated individual discrimination is not promoting a member of a lower social group in the workplace because of this membership, in other words on the grounds of his ethnic, religious or gender affiliations. Sidanius and Pratto [9] have stated that if such individual discrimination continues for long periods such as weeks, years and centuries, a clear difference in power and distinct differences emerge among social groups. Group-based social hierarchies do not emerge only from individual discrimination behaviors. Group-based discrimination behaviors may emerge by virtue of official or private institutions, laws, courts, banks, hospitals and schools in addition to individual discrimination. According to Pratto *et al.* [13], the upper groups apply pressure and violence to sub-groups with the legal institutions (police, military, etc.) they have and thus aim to maintain their advantageous position. Discrimination against social groups can continue through such institutional structures. According to some studies conducted in different countries, individuals belonging to low-status groups are punished by public authorities at higher levels compared to upper-group members. Accordingly it can be asserted that institutions such as security forces, the army and the judiciary contribute to maintaining the inequality between the groups [14].

According to the social dominance theory, group-based social hierarchy is formed by network effects of discrimination across multi-dimensional grades which are the processes between institutions, individuals and collaborative groups. Discrimination in these grades provides ease of coordination to dominant groups on subgroups [10].

Individuals undergoing discrimination, while reducing the values of their social identity by recalling that their groups have low position on the one hand, also make discrimination to be seen as the cause of failure instead of personal reasons in this process. This leads individuals who are subjected to discrimination to be identified more with their groups and increase of their individual values in a positive way [15].

CONCLUSION

Understanding the causes and consequences of prejudice and discrimination, as serious obstacles to enlightenment, is one of the hardest tasks for human beings. It is a shame for human beings not still solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, preventing the Catholic-Protestant separations or sect conflicts between Muslims while the human beings have undersigned numerous discoveries and are trying to solve the mysteries of the universe. Prejudice and discrimination with a range extending from verbal violence to genocide constitutes the foundation of many wars and clashes in the world.

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