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Abstract

This study aims to determine the differences, if any, between male and female members of society when confronted with the idea of having contact with people of different sexual identities/orientations, using Bogardus social distance scale. The results show a slightly higher rate of prejudice among men, but an overall irrelevant trend, proportionally to the scale.

Introduction

This investigation is into prejudice. Prejudice can be defined as “an attitude towards a particular group or member of the group, based on characteristics which are assumed to be common to all members of the group”. There are three sides to prejudice: the affective side (feeling negative things towards a group), the behavioural side (discrimination) and the cognitive side (stereotyping and expectations). Prejudice can be positive or negative, but the type which is potentially degrading or harmful to society is negative. Some of the most common kinds of prejudice are: sexism (discrimination on the grounds of sex), heterosexism (regarding gay men and lesbian women as abnormal), racism (a negative attitude towards someone of another race), ageism (discrimination on the basis of age), etc.

Previous research in this area includes Adorno’s **authoritarian personality**, Tajfel’s **social identity theory** and Sherif’s **competition theory**.

In America’s 1950s, Adorno suggested the idea of a personality type which is more likely to be prejudiced. His research was inspired by the behaviour of Nazi soldiers in World War II. After interviewing hundreds of people, he and his colleagues found a pattern of personality characteristics which they called the authoritarian personality. People belonging to this type of personality tend to be hostile to those who are

of inferior status, obedient and servile to those of higher status, fairly rigid in their opinions and beliefs, intolerant of uncertainty or ambiguity, conventional, upholding traditional values. The cause of all this, Adorno suggested, was an unconscious hostility towards their parents who, apparently, gave them a harsh upbringing and faced them with criticism. The hostility which had built up was displaced and redirected towards weaker people who could not harm them.

A criticism of this theory is that it is only a correlation, therefore it is unknown whether one condition caused the other. The children might well have observed and imitated their parents, through social learning.

21 years later, Tajfel suggested that social categorisation is the first step in the stereotyping process. He based this on the fact that one of the basic cognitive processes is categorisation, we tend to divide people into the in-group, us, and the out-group, them. The most important findings he made were: we favour the in-group over the out-group, we exaggerate the differences between groups, we see members of the out-group as more alike than they really are. The reason behind this is that belonging to a group is an important element which contributes to our self-esteem and pride. The more we discriminate another group, the better our group will appear and this will enhance our status and confidence.

The main criticism of Tajfel's study is that it is experimentally based and artificial. In real life, people tend to enhance their own group without necessarily denigrating others.

Finally, an element which has to be considered when talking prejudice is, according to Sherif, competition. He devised a field experiment involving 22 12 year-old boys. They were randomly assigned to two groups and had to go through several competitions as part of their summer camp. He found that hostility quickly arose, with boys attacking each other. Competition increases prejudice towards the out-group and unity within the in-group.

Criticisms of this study are: the groups were artificial, the results cannot be generalised and the study broke ethical guidelines.

As Sherif used a sample of 12 year-old boys, the results cannot be applied to the rest of the population. In an attempt to cover this unexplored aspect, I decided to investigate the differences between males and females (of all ages) when it comes to prejudice. The aim of the study is to find out whether males are more prejudiced than females. The out-group chosen to confront the participants with was people of a different sexual identity or orientation from theirs.

Aim

The aim of this study is to find out whether males are more prejudiced compared to females when confronted with the idea of having various forms of direct and indirect contact with people of a different sexual identity or orientation.

Hypothesis

What is expected to be found in this study is that males are more prejudiced on average compared to females when presented with the idea of having various forms of contact with people of a different sexual identity or orientation than theirs.

Method

Design → The experimental design was independent and natural. The independent variable was the gender of the participants, either male or female. The dependant variable was the level of prejudice that the participants would score.

I have chosen this design in order to get direct and definite information from the people who took part in the experiment, therefore avoiding the confusions an observational study could imply. Rather than having to assume the reasons behind the participants beliefs and behaviour, I chose to ask them the questions directly.

One of the possible extraneous variables was the social norm the participants might have been likely to act under: them being in a public space, the concept of taking a survey, talking to a stranger, etc.

Nevertheless, several procedures were used in order to control these variables. Some of them were: approaching the participants in an assertive, neutral manner, asking the questions in an impartial tone, not reacting to any particular answer to avoid conformity, looking professional and making sure the people know there is no correct or good answer.

The reason for choosing heterosexism as the type of prejudice to test people on was its relatively new emergence; a century ago, it was homosexuality that was perceived as the disorder, whereas today it is heterosexism which is seen as the problem. Also, racism, ageism or prejudice on grounds of religion might have had more extraneous variables which would have been more difficult to control, as they are more of an affective part of many people's lives.

Participants → I approached a random sample of people from various public places and asked them to volunteer to answer the questionnaire which was essentially Bogardus social distance scale. The participants were 10 females and 10 males of different ages, backgrounds, occupations and interests.

Materials → I used a sheet of paper with a table representing Bogardus social distance scale and filled it in accordingly to my investigation with the IV and DV. I applied it as a questionnaire. I obtained the table from my psychology teacher.

Example of the sheet I used can be found in appendix (b).

Procedure → The study was carried out as follows. Me and a friend went to different public spaces, such as a mall, park or campus and approached various people who didn't appear to be busy or involved in an activity that might require their direct attention. We presented them with a brief. If they accepted to take part in the study, we would use the materials to record their scores. When the questionnaire has been answered, we would debrief them.

A copy of the standardised instructions can be found in appendix (a).

Ethics → According to the code of ethics, when attempting such an experiment, there are certain issues to be considered. Some of the most important ones are informed consent, stress, deception and the right to withdraw.

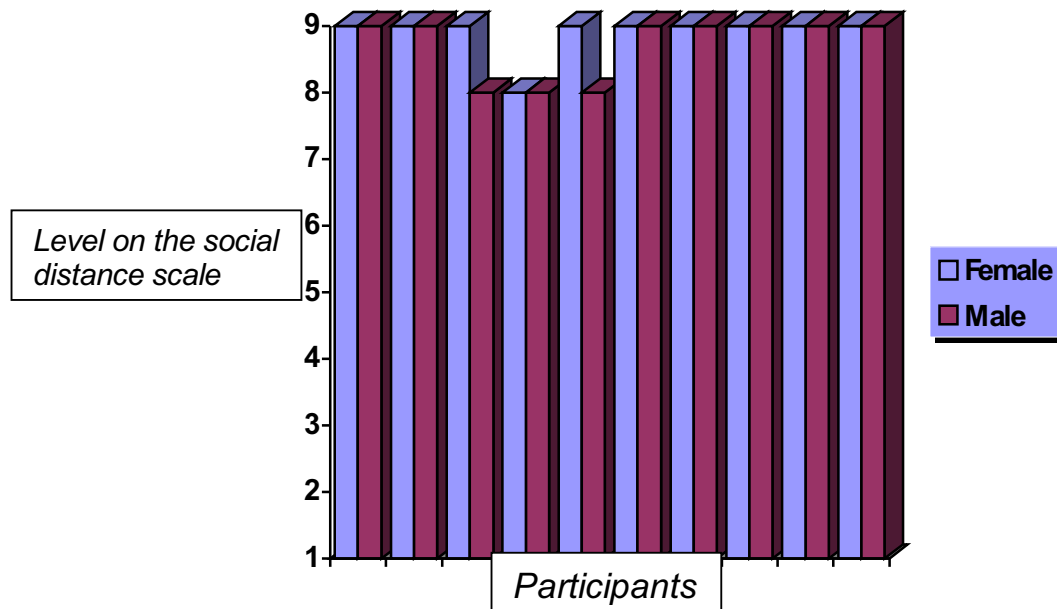
This investigation took these matters into account by debriefing people and giving them the option not to take part in the experiment. The participants answered all the questions with full consent and through their own will. As a result, they did not have to experience stress or discomfort, as there was no pressure on them. They had the option to withdraw at any point in the progress.

Results

Summary of scores on social distance scale

	Males	Females
Mean	8.7	8.9
Range	1	1

Individual scores of males and females on the social distance scale



The mean for females is 8.9; the mean for males is 8.7 and the range for both conditions is 1. This shows that males scored on average less than females, making them on the scale more prejudiced.

The hypothesis which was supported by the results was that males are more prejudiced than females.

The conclusion from the analysis of the results is that, indeed, the hypothesis is confirmed, as results indicate that males are more prejudiced than females on average.

Discussion

Results → The results indicate that there is a slight difference between the level of prejudice scored by males compared to females. Males appear to be around 2% more prejudiced than females. It would be worth taking into account the fact that most participants, male and female, scored very high on the scale, which is translated into very low levels of prejudice. The range for both conditions is 1, which means that all participants had very little narrow-mindedness.

Background → This investigation confirmed that there might have been another extraneous variable in Sherif's camp experiment, the participants being all male. He would probably have got different results if the participants had been female, of different ages, male and female, etc. Also, it is notorious that males are more likely to take competition seriously, which could have influenced the results Sherif got and attributed solely to prejudice.

As for Adorno's authoritarian personality theory, it is unknown whether females (had they been given the opportunity) would have acted the same as Nazi males. The general increased level of aggression and sense of social duty in males might have deteriorated the results Adorno linked to prejudice.

Criticisms → The most obvious limitation of this study is geographical and cultural. Even though the participants were males and females of all ages, they were all part of the same community of Norwich and the UK. The results cannot therefore be applied to other nations. The general Zeitgeist of contemporarity which affects all studies has included the politics of the UK (homosexuality is legal), determining more and more people of various sexual identities and orientations to safely come out and take an active part in society. This has had a powerful impact on the general view of the majority on people belonging to sexual minorities.

Also, participants were asked the questions in a public place and manner which might have affected their responses. They might have

avoided expressing their reluctance towards people of different sexual identities or orientations due to social norms, e.g. respecting and tolerating everyone regardless of their sexual label.

Another criticism of this investigation is methodological. Asking people directly questions may put pressure on them, even just on a subconscious level. While cognitively unprejudiced, there might still be an unconscious trace of inactive prejudice which could not be measured whatsoever.

Improvements → Future similar studies could be improved by using an anonymous approach, possibly by submitting the questionnaire later or online surveys.

To increase the coverage of the study, multiple cultures and nations should be sampled.

Implications → Some applied uses of these findings could be: encouraging males to take on public relations jobs which would offer more contact with various people of different backgrounds and beliefs which might in turn reduce their prejudice (although Sherif argued this might not necessarily be the case), speculating the subconscious reasons for crimes, especially hate crimes, taking action in schools to tackle and prevent prejudice taking place from an early age.

References

“Psychology First” (second edition) by Barbara Woods, p. 97, 101-105

Appendix

a) Standardised Instructions, Brief, Debrief

Approach people in public spaces; make sure they aren't involved in an activity that requires their attention and that they have free time for the questionnaire. Dress in neutral clothes and adopt an impartial posture, attitude and tone. On the table sheet note people's scores as numbers or lines in the according level box to keep track of the number of male and female participants and their ranks.

If someone didn't mind, say, the thing involved at level 1, you keep asking the following questions up to level 9. If at any given level they do mind, you stop there and mark their rank.

A **brief** example is:

"Hello. Would you like to take part in my GCSE psychology study? It will only take a couple of minutes and it involves answering some questions in a questionnaire. The topic is prejudice."

A **debrief** example is:

"Thank you for taking part in my experiment. We have attributed you with a score on Bogardus social distance scale based on your answers. We will use this information anonymously and for the sole purpose of the study. Thank you again and have a nice day."

b) Materials

This is the table I used to record people's scores.

Bogardus Social Distance Scale

How would you feel about having people of a different sexual identity or orientation ... ?	Male	Female
1 – live in your country		
2 – live in your city		
3 – live in your neighbourhood		
4 – work alongside you in your job		
5 – live on your street		
6 – live next door to you		

7 – be your close personal friend		
8 – marry one of your children		
9 – no prejudice level		

c) Raw Data

Participant	Score
Male 1	9
Male 2	9
Male 3	8
Male 4	8
Male 5	8
Male 6	9
Male 7	9
Male 8	9
Male 9	9
Male 10	9
Female 1	9
Female 2	9
Female 3	9
Female 4	8
Female 5	9
Female 6	9
Female 7	9
Female 8	9

Female 9	9
Female 10	9