



INTRODUCTION TO PREJUDICE

OSUN Connected Learning Contest Winner

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Course: Social Psychology

Prejudice is the final unit of Social Psychology. It ends the semester by bringing together theoretical information we've covered throughout the semester (e.g., on attitude formation, the distinction between automatic and controlled psychological processes) in an applied venue, ends the class in an applied, forward-looking way, and capitalizes on students' intrinsic motivation for the topic at the busy (and exhausting) end of a long semester. The assignment introduces key concepts on the cognitive and emotional roots of prejudice as a setup to a three-class unit, and gives students the opportunities to analyze and integrate information in reading, lecture and video formats, to consider the benefits and limits of different methodologies, and to apply course content to novel situations.

Social Psychology

Social psychology is the scientific study of human thought, behavior, and feelings in their social contexts. This class will survey many of the processes that influence and are influenced by our interactions with others, such as attitude formation and change, conformity, and persuasion. We will also use principles of social psychology to understand the ordinary origins of benevolent (e.g., altruism, helping behavior) and malevolent (e.g., aggression, prejudice) aspects of human behavior. Throughout the course, we will emphasize the influence of culture, race, and gender on the topics addressed.

Practical and pedagogical value

As described below, the material was delivered asynchronously yet required several elements of active engagement - students had to complete a quiz on the reading before beginning the

lesson, and complete free writes before, during, and after the lecture/ video components. In general, students reported finding the integrated lectures/ free writes very helpful in the remote learning context, as the writing prompts forced them to attend closely to the material delivered in the short video lecture.

I often use free writes in the traditional classroom without collecting them. By doing them online I was able to access them and see the depth of students' thinking and knowledge in a new way. When we return to the traditional format I will try to integrate more online (or just collected) free writes, as they gave me new insight and helped me plan future classes and direct subsequent synchronous and asynchronous class time to areas of student interest or confusion.

The two Youtube videos were high impact, in that they are emotionally engaging, and the second video takes place at Bard, which students loved seeing. Although I assigned only segments of longer videos, several students noted in their free writes or emails to me that they watched the entire videos.

The assignment

Preparation. Before class, students read a section of the textbook and completed an associated quiz on Moodle. These elements were built into the class pre-covid. Each quiz in the class was a 10-minute open book exercise that consisted of multiple-choice questions randomly selected from a larger set of questions (so each student had a different quiz). Quizzes emphasized conceptual understanding and application of material.

Warmup. Before watching my short lecture, students completed a warmup free write on Moodle in which they answered the question: "Based on the reading and your own experience, what do you think are some causes of prejudice today?"

Lecture. Students watched a 20-minute prerecorded lecture in which I described foundational work in prejudice and addressed the following topics:

1. Key ideas
2. How does the empirical study of prejudice differ from other approaches to studying prejudice?
 - a. Several examples of demonstrations of prejudice from psychology and economics (e.g., differences in hiring or retail decisions based on race)
 - b. An introduction to several different psychological mechanisms that might underlie prejudice (cognition, emotion, motivation, automatic processes) that connected back to topics from earlier in the class

3. Introduction to the cognitive roots of prejudice, and the ways in which very minimal, and even arbitrary, group distinctions can elicit a very strong preference for groups to which one belongs, compared to groups to which they don't belong.

“A Class Divided” video. Students watched a 15 segment of a video showing a demonstration conducted in the 1960s by elementary school teacher Jane Elliott. Following Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination, Elliott divided her all-white third grade class in Iowa into “brown eyes” and “blue eyes” groups. Blue eyed students were treated preferentially on the first day, and brown-eyed students on the second day. The results were powerful – blue-eyed students quickly turned against their brown-eyed friends and students from both groups accepted the narrative about group hierarchies. It is a powerful example of how easily prejudices can form.

“A Class Divided free write.” After watching this 15-minute segment, students returned to Moodle and responded to the free write prompt “What observations do you have about the video? What surprised you? Why did that surprise you?” This prompt was intentionally broad because students have widely differing, and often quite powerful and/ or emotional reactions to the video. Answers ranged from their own emotional reactions (“disturbing”) to sophisticated application of course material about self fulfilling prophecies, social influence, obedience, cognitive dissonance, and automatic and controlled thinking.

“The Angry Eye” video. Jane Elliot went on to develop her class exercise into a facilitated workshop that she continues to [deliver today](#). Serendipitously, her workshop at Bard in the 1990s was the basis for the 2001 PBS documentary The Angry Eye. After completing the previous free write, students watched minutes 5-30 of the documentary, which showed Bard students (in Olin LC 115) participating in a version of the blue eyes/ brown eyes exercise. It is heated, emotional, and at times uncomfortable.

End of class free write. After watching this video session, students again completed a series of free writes in which they reflected on the experience of watching the video, analyzed the content in terms of prior course content and their new knowledge, and looked forward to our remaining two lessons on prejudice. The free write prompts were:

1. Were you surprised to see this exercise unfold in this way at Bard? Why or why not?
2. Do you think these kinds of exercise reflect the process of prejudice in the real world? Why or why not?
3. Do you think this kind of intervention is effective at reducing prejudice? Why or why not? Drawing on the reading, what are some other ways that we can reduce prejudice?
4. What would you like us to focus on when we continue talking about prejudice on Thursday and next week?