

Book Reviews

Understanding Prejudice, Racism, and Social Conflict

Augustinos, M. & Reynolds, K., (Editors)

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reviewed by:
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Prejudice Viewed from Down-Under

A professor at a major university in Auckland recently told my wife and I that prejudice is "just not a problem in Auckland." Sadly, for reasons I describe below, I'd say Auckland is awash with prejudice. In my own life here, I've routinely experienced racist comments around Auckland's far North Shore. It might be a lot different in Auckland's city centre (and elsewhere in New Zealand), but it's probably not reasonable to conclude that "prejudice just isn't a problem" here.

For instance, it is extremely rare in New Zealand (in my experience) to find professional university-degreed white folks from Britain, Canada, America, or northern Europe stocking grocery market shelves or cleaning toilets for a living. It is, unfortunately, quite commonplace to find post-professional university-degreed non-white folks employed here in this way...and indefinitely so. Most I've met speak excellent English (and probably have since kindergarten). But their accents betray that they are not Brits or Kiwis or North Americans. One immigrant I know of holds postgraduate degrees from two prestigious British universities. He formerly (and quite recently) served as a full professor in a "high-tech" field at a prestigious university on the Mediterranean. Awarded abundant points on his New Zealand immigration form for his immense technical education, he's been here for a few years now - driving a taxicab. Another unfortunately typical example: a husband and wife in strife-torn Sri Lanka had applied to the NZ immigration service only to be told that they were close enough to qualifying (with their Bachelors degrees) that they should pursue Masters degrees and then re-apply. In desperation, they forced themselves and their children to sacrifice normal family relations so that both parents could continue full-time employment while also completing an

intensive (and expensive) full-time MBA programme in Sri Lanka. These parents had their children take care of themselves for two years under these stressful conditions - just to qualify for New Zealand immigration. Having been here over a year now, they still work in menial entry-level employment (delivering morning newspapers house-to-house and working a late-night shift pumping petrol into cars) - with personal finances so depleted by the move that additional relocation is highly unlikely.

Just from my own casual acquaintances, I could easily provide a dozen Auckland examples like this - I suspect many Aucklanders could. Obviously, the "plural of anecdote is not necessarily data" (anonymous aphorism) and the role of prejudice in this problem remains an empirical question - but if Kiwi business interests required this kind of deceptive "points-based" immigration to flatten local salary pressures, it surely has gone far enough (and doubtless went far enough several years ago).

Collectively, we've immigrated tens of thousands of people into New Zealand under this sort of false premise - potentially destroying tens of thousands of careers (given the broad gaps this situation is placing into each such immigrant's CV). Over the past few years, I've heard New Zealand media commentators fretting about a "brain drain" - and in this fretting, I don't recall the mention of under-employed immigrants with professional degrees and experience. The factors and motives that have created this sad situation will not all be connected to prejudice, but it's a very likely component - and the outcome is shocking. It is, in my view, a national travesty - and certainly suggests that prejudice may indeed be "a problem in Auckland" and elsewhere.

Tragically, prejudice is nearly ubiquitous and usually insidious. Many of us probably first deal with it overtly and intentionally as kindergartners or primary schoolers via pejorative non-verbal cues or pathetic humor targeting some demographic group. The early sarcasm-laden school-year experiences likely act upon coping systems developed in early childhood (i.e., attachment to the familiar, e.g., Aboud, 1988) - and thus foster overt and covert out-grouping behaviors - probably encouraging them to become all-the-more entrenched and resistant to change. This new book, edited by Australian university scholars Martha Augustinos and Katherine Reynolds, goes far in detailing and unpacking what many would reasonably describe as the defining dilemma of our time. This book is a master work - and its title is quite appropriate. It is a summary piece of the state-

of-the-art in prejudice research (and its likely future) as viewed by nearly two dozen psychology scholars working in the Southern Hemisphere. And it manages to make a substantial contribution to the literature at the same time as it is reasonably comprehensive.

In calling it "Understanding Prejudice, Racism, and Social Conflict" the editors are using those latter terms not just to expand the reader's first impression of the book's content, but to focus it. In other words, there are obvious applications of prejudice theories (beyond racism) that are purposefully omitted, probably due to a lack of highly salient relevance to the serious social conflicts of our age - or because some forms (like sexism and anti-Semitism) are justifiably appropriate for separate volumes. For instance, while a few pages do describe sexism research, other non-racial prejudices (i.e., irrational pejorative prejudgments) related to perceived attributes (e.g., age, religions, occupations, etc.), are not explicitly covered. However, generic prejudice-related theories (e.g., Social Identity Theory and Self-categorization Theory) are treated rather thoroughly.

This limitation was a reasonable choice by the editors, for to do otherwise would have generated a prejudice handbook of encyclopedic proportions. This book is impressively comprehensive as is — indeed it's amazing they've achieved this depth and breadth of coverage in a small paperback that allowed its authors to present new data and substantial methodological detail. The book is an affordable densely-packed marvel — and post-graduate students will love it. Additionally, some of the recent findings presented amount to serious advances for the field.

This volume is divided - quite logically - into six parts, and I describe each briefly. The first of these ("Prejudice and Racism: Defining the Problem, 'Knowing' the Experience") lays the groundwork impressively for the rest of the book. It first defines key terms, summarizes the functions and efforts within psychological science that have, in their own right, been viewed by some as racist or ethnocentric, and then with that as a cautionary backdrop, summarizes the way that psychologists have typically positioned prejudice-related and racism-related research efforts. This part concludes with an overview of the book and a chapter that describes, in profound and thought-provoking terms, the experience of racial prejudice in Australia (and the inadequacies there of seeing modern racism as distinctly modern and old-fashioned racism as deceased).

The second part (entitled: "Development, Socialization, and Personality") nicely summarizes the measurements and theoretical approaches to the development of children's prejudices coupled with an overview of the relevant evidence regarding developmental socialization experiences. This part of the book concludes with the prolific P. C. L. Heaven's densely-packed review of the history of personality-based approaches to prejudice research - including the latest psychometric/correlational evidence regarding the promising application of Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA, Altemeyer, 1981, 1996) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO, Sidanius, 1993, Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle, 1994).

The third part of the book (entitled: "Social Cognition, Mood, and Attitudes") describes the experimental/social

cognitive approaches that have been used in prejudice research — focusing on implicit processes (e.g., cognitive processes operating pre-consciously or sub-consciously). A recent and disturbing finding presented in this third part will provide a representative example of this section's material (and its details hopefully illuminate the potential power of social cognitive experimentation). Locke and Walker (1999 cited in this text) applied a social cognitive design that allows us, in my view, to distinguish between automatic prejudicial stereotype activation and habitual prejudicial stereotype activation.

Using a dual-task approach in their experiment, these researchers used the first of the two tasks in each trial to covertly assess the degree of stereotype content activation in their subjects' cognitions (with subjects sorted into high and low prejudice classifications). When their high prejudice subjects had two seconds warning (i.e., just enough time to prepare for a judgement or appraisal of a demographic category - their second task in each trial), they evinced increased activation of negative/pejorative stereotype content - but not positive/flattering stereotype content. When they only had a quarter of a second warning (i.e., requiring dependence on automatic cognitive processes), their high prejudice subjects evinced cognitive activation of both positive and negative stereotype content. Their low prejudice subjects showed no evidence of activation favoring stereotypic concepts over non-stereotypic concepts under either condition - a powerful outcome convincingly connecting individual difference measures with private cognitive behaviors.

In this same section, Leith Baird and Julie Duck (p. 126) present a more complex - but equally impressive and disturbing - series of studies where social judgments and associated information processing are examined. In this case, the studies assess the degree to which judgments are distorted in the interest of mood relief (e.g., where mood and mood lability - i.e. change-ability - are manipulated). The studies had been conducted in anticipation that negative mood participants who believe their mood is labile will show more bias or discrimination. In line with this expectation, Baird and Duck did, indeed, find that when participants believed their mood was changeable, initially-negative mood participants enjoyed greater mood repair via discriminatory behavior. In other words, collectively, these studies supported the following disturbing conclusion: participants "who believed that their mood was labile felt better because they discriminated. We concluded that for high-status group members in a negative mood, discrimination is a motivated affect-control strategy used in the service of mood relief, and mood repair is a direct effect of such discrimination" (p. 138).

This section of the book closes with a chapter entitled: "Prejudiced Attitudes, Group Norms, and Discriminatory Behavior" by Terry, Hogg, and Blackwood (p. 140). In this chapter, the unreliable connection between attitudes and behaviors (in this book's context) is re-examined in the light of group norms. The social cognitive process of depersonalization via self-categorization is used to support a renewed focus on group norms - specifically assessing the role of attitudinal-congruence of in-group norms as a predictor of one's willingness to engage in attitudinally-

congruent behaviors. The research these authors review supports the conclusion that "people are more likely to behave in accordance with their intergroup attitudes if the attitude... is supported by... a self-relevant reference group" (p. 153). Their chapter provides a seamless transition into the material that follows.

Part Four is entitled: "Prejudice and Group Life" and it argues that prejudice is best understood as a group process. It aggressively attacks research approaches that attempt to explain prejudice as a product of intra-psychic individual processes operating consistently within people as they move through changing social systems and environs. The general notion is conveyed by Reynolds and Turner (p. 160) in the following quote:

"...prejudices, along with many other social psychological phenomena, are believed to be an outcome of a complex system of social relations that cannot be reduced to analysis of individuals as isolated, asocial psychological units. Attempts to dislocate individuals' psychological functioning from...social forces...and contexts...are viewed as individualistic (i.e., they ignore group-based processes...) and reductionistic (i.e., they seek to explain a complex system that possesses its own [system-based] unique features in terms of its constituent parts" [or more typically some simplistic aggregate]."

This portion of the text provides the book's most detailed descriptions of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978, Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and Self-categorization Theory (Turner, et al, 1987) - theories which attempt to include consideration of the inter-group/societal forces relevant to prejudice. Also provided is a fairly detailed description of the minimal groups methodology. The example used is Tajfel, et al (1971), where schoolboys were supposedly sorted (deceptively as they are really just bogusly classified) according to trivial criteria (e.g., after the boys estimate the number of dots on a screen they are "classified" into the over-estimators group or the under-estimators group - alternatively, after boys state a preference for either a Klee painting or a Kandinsky painting they are bogusly classified as either Klees or Kandinskies). As is typical in these minimal groups designs, the boys were then ask to complete a resource allocation task using a distribution matrix. The matrix is such that the boys must make choices about distributing some resources or tokens to other participants. In the aggregate, the choices made hopefully reveal the in-grouping/out-grouping behaviors of the participants.

Of course, what has been found in many such studies is that people favor their in-group and discriminate against the out-group members (Tajfel, 1978, for a review see Diehl, 1990). Initially, this was surprising, as the intent of the first study was to establish a no-discrimination baseline — then sequentially add increasingly non-trivial group definitions that would, at some point, trigger discrimination. But instead, Tajfel, et al, found that even the trivial group definitions used for this baseline produce discriminatory behavior. The methodology is potentially powerful, and re-considering it in the light of this section's other material may be suggestive of research still needed.

Part Five of this book (entitled "The Language and

Rhetoric of Racism") presents fascinating examples of the way racist motives subtly corrupt our communications - doing so in ways that tend to maintain irrational disadvantages for minority cultures and heavily-stereotyped groups. Particularly powerful passages in this section are the reviews and arguments of Wetherell and Potter, 1988, 1992; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). As cited in this text, Wetherell and Potter provide a set of ten "common 'rhetorically self-sufficient' or clinching arguments" (p. 222) apparently associated, at least in the minds of the speakers, with liberal egalitarian principles of freedom and fairness (e.g., "Everybody should be treated equally." p. 222). These sound reasonable at first blush, but put in the context of Maori/Pakeha relations and disputes, it is clear how these principled arguments can be used as a discursive arsenal for maintaining irrational disadvantages - combined in ways that allow a speaker "to avoid a racist identity and to [simultaneously/paradoxically] justify existing Maori-Pakeha relations" (p. 223).

The book's most heroic part comes at the end - Part Six: "Future Directions." First is John Duckitt's piece on "Reducing Prejudice" and it is, alone, well worth the price of the entire volume. The first third of the chapter's highly logical structure is laid out in an introductory table which divides the 20th Century into six periods or eras (labeled via a defining social-historical issue relevant to prejudice). For each era thus defined, the table (and with greater detail and elaboration - Duckitt's chapter) describes the conceptualizations of prejudice and the dominant theoretical approach. It then describes the dominant social policy orientation for each era. This prepares the reader for an extensive description of a multi-level framework for prejudice reduction. Duckitt puts forward an outline for a comprehensive set of interventions for reducing prejudice at four causal levels.

The first of these is the perceptual-cognitive level (including the underlying information processing mechanisms, social categorizations, and in-group favoritism that results). Duckitt argues, that while none of these "processes seem readily modifiable, the kind of categorizations that are salient for people can be changed" (p. 260). Duckitt goes on to describe what are, admittedly, problematic scenarios associated with competing approaches to changing these categorizations. At the next causal level, Duckitt describes ways we might change individual susceptibility to prejudice, although at this causal level, in my view, unfortunate rebound effects are a potential problem (see below). At a still higher (or more molar) causal level - the interpersonal level, Duckitt describes how cross-racial contact experiences, at least conceivably, can "be structured in ways that may ameliorate the impact of even "apartheid" type social structures, or conversely weaken the effects of a broader social structure conducive to tolerance" (p. 265). The broadest causal level - the societal-intergroup level - as one would expect, involves salient changes to problematic and enduring social conditions - conditions which encourage or aggravate racial prejudices.

As mentioned, it is brave of Duckitt to lay out a comprehensive framework for reducing prejudice (though

clearly he is among the world's most qualified for the endeavor). However, it would be, in my view, appropriate to compare or compete his detailed approaches in regard to minimizing rebound (i.e., the apparent enhancement of prejudicial stereotype-influenced behaviors that can follow encouraged stereotype suppression, e.g., MacCrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994). In fact, in my view, many of the chapters in this book would have benefited from consideration of rebound research - as it is possibly one of the most important contributions to stereotype-related theories to be derived from the social experimental activities of the 1990s. Macrae and his colleagues have repeatedly found evidence that putting people into stereotype-suppression² conditions (contexts where they avoid the expression of stereotype-based descriptions or speculations) seems to intensify the activation and subsequent application of stereotype content.

This suppression-driven rebound phenomenon should concern those who conduct race relations education interventions - in that the situational context (of the race relations classroom) at least implicitly, if not explicitly, encourages participant (i.e., student) suppression of prejudicial stereotypes. If the findings of C. Neil Macrae and others generalize to this classroom context, we could have associated forms of intervention doing harm as well as good. Rebound may have serious implications for other forms of prejudice-reducing interventions - and it might be valuable for John Duckitt's programme (or intervention "menu") to be re-visited in that context. That said, I should repeat: Duckitt's chapter was a grandly ambitious undertaking and the contribution it makes is substantial.

No less substantial is the book's final chapter, Stephen Reicher's "Studying Psychology Studying Racism" (p. 273). Within it, Reicher argues convincingly of the need to focus on behavioral manifestations and consequences of prejudice - and at the very least (for cognitive researchers) allowing these to guide the laboratory pursuits. As regards the former, he goes on to say:

"...racist action may equally be manifested in denying the right of the racial minority to participate in the dominant group culture or in forcing them to abandon their culture in favour of that of the dominant group. Ghettoization and assimilationism are both racist when they subsume the choices of the minority to the preferences of the majority. Conversely, facilitating the choice [emphasis added] of minority group members to celebrate their own culture or else [occasionally or enduringly] to adopt new cultures are far from racist acts [even if those acts require us to articulate race explicitly]. [Finally]...by characterizing racism in terms of racist action we focus on the phenomena which led us to undertake our studies in the first place. The reason why the psychology of intergroup relations acquired such prominence in the period since the Second World War is not because the Nazis thought badly of Jewish people, but because they slaughtered six million Jews. The reason why we are concerned with issues of race and racism concerning Black people is because of the acts of discrimination which ensure that on virtually every statistic Black people are worse off while (in Britain at least) racist attacks and murders are

on the increase (e.g., Bhat et al, 1988). As Iain Walker shows in his chapter [in this book: Chapter Two], it is equally true that the reason we are concerned with racism against Aboriginal Australians is because discrimination leaves them poorer, less healthy, and with much diminished life-expectancy." (p. 274).

It is hopefully apparent, via Reicher's conclusion to this line of reasoning, why I believe C. Neil Macrae's (and now others') rebound research is central to the topic of the book. This becomes salient as Reicher concludes:

"...this stress on racist action as the actual denial of choice does not mean that I consider thoughts and feelings and expressions of dislike to be irrelevant. Not at all. But we are interested in them to the extent that they are associated with other acts of subordination....and the two are not always associated. The link must be a matter of investigation rather than of presupposition."

In closing, I must add, while this is an extraordinarily valuable and insightful book, it does have three other minor - but definitely notable - flaws. Per its own marketing material, this text is supposedly "appropriately pitched for the undergraduate reader" (back cover) - yet on page one, readers are invited to contemplate the differing "epistemological assumptions and orientations" for the competing "analytic frameworks for understanding racism and prejudice" - and whether or not an "integration [of these frameworks] is possible" (p. 2). This challenge would not be within the grasp of the typical undergraduates I am acquainted with (in fact, successful "integration" strategies probably evade many interested post-doctoral scholars). Generally, for most of this text, I'd estimate a more appropriate readership level to be honours-year or post-graduate. As a university textbook, this publication would be an excellent companion reader - either as an applied contextual framework for a social cognition or experimental social psychology course - or as a psychological perspective in a prejudice or racism/sexism sociology course. Its excellence in this regard cannot, in my view, be overstated. To my knowledge, the book is without peer, and its coverage is comprehensive enough to make it a reasonable choice (as a primary text) for prejudice courses in psychology-related programs of all sorts.

As for the second minor flaw - I would have preferred to see at least some brief mention of future directions in prejudice research building upon the socio-physiological or social neuroscience work pioneered by John T. Cacioppo and colleagues. Advances related to prejudice have been seen in facial electro-myography research applied to racial prejudice (e.g., Vanman, Paul, Ito, & Miller, 1997) and more recent functional MRI work on amygdala activation potentially relevant to racism (e.g., Hart, Whalen, Shin, McInerney, Fischer, & Rauch, S., 2000; Phelps, O'Connor, Cunningham, Funayama, Gatenby, Gore, & Banaji, 2000). A social neuroscience approach to emotions research is an arena that will likely see technology-driven growth - maybe explosive growth - and its application to prejudice research is too likely to ignore (similarly noted by Fiske, 2000). Readers would also benefit had the authors at least mentioned the modern technologies applied in Moskowitz,

Gollwitzer, Wasel, & Schaal's (1999) technology-facilitated studies of chronic egalitarianism in the context of the Modern Sexism Scale. Where this book is to be used as a primary text for a prejudice course, some additional readings (from the relatively new sub-discipline of social neuroscience) would be appropriate.

As for the third minor flaw - unfortunately, this book is not entirely free of an occasional editorial or polemical need for vengeful judgements about prejudiced people. It's arguably a bit peculiar for individual judgmentalism to be applied in this way within what is otherwise an excellent science textbook. For example, social cognitive perspectives (involving seemingly unavoidable automatic/implicit/pre-conscious cognitive processes) are criticized repeatedly for the way they supposedly excuse an individual's prejudiced behaviour - or for the way they "assume race to be a natural category which people automatically use to categorize self and others" (p. 7). To be fair, the book's first chapter (authored by the editors) deals explicitly with such criticism. In these social cognitive perspectives, the critics assert that race has become "a non-problematic given which is somehow inherent in the empirical reality of observable or imagined biological difference" (Hopkins, Reicher, & Levine, 1997 quoted on p. 7 of this text). As a defender of these social cognitive perspectives, I would adjust those words to convey: as a "given" - race-flavoured social cognitions occurring in varying degrees across and within individuals may well be absurdly "justified" - by some of those individuals - due to "imagined biological differences" (p. 7, emphasis added) - I don't see how that relieves those individuals (or their developmental role models) of shared responsibility for those misinformed imaginations. Furthermore, I don't know any social cognitive researchers who would consider any such "given" to be non-problematic.

Social cognitive researchers often study processes that arguably developed into largely final form in one's pre- and early adolescent years. While accepting that argument does nothing to lift responsibility for self-improvement off one's shoulders, it does call into question the utility of criticising or abandoning research paradigms simply because they're insufficiently punishing. When researchers' socio-political preferences or judgmental needs begin to dictate their empirical methodological preferences, we'd be wise to be concerned. While some of the criticisms leveled at social cognitive experimentation probably stem from post-modernist ideas (Gergen, 2001), I would hope that postmodernism would not guide us away from social cognitive theories because such theories lack morally-judgmental features. It would seem dubious to reject otherwise fruitful research perspectives simply because some philosophical interpretations of the associated theories seemingly excuse the prejudice detected. Social science research must work hard enough as it is — without adding the researcher's vengeful or redemptive needs to its burden.

The protagonist in the film "Shallow Hal" who, via hypnosis, loses his ability to be shallow (i.e., his knack or habit for prejudicially viewing women who lack perfect figures), provides a relevant exemplar. He eventually realizes his good fortune and exclaims: "I am so lucky!"

He rather correctly, I believe, concludes that most humans are not so lucky - and his exclamation manifests his perception of his own good fortune. This good fortune is highly salient to him precisely because of its rarity. The sad fact is that most humans maturing in any culture probably maintain prejudicial views of at least one demographic identifiable to them - and they likely do so on some or most occasions in a way that is independent of moral virtue considerations.

From a global or species perspective, I'm confident that chronic egalitarians are a minority (although hopefully a sizable one). That excuses nothing, but it makes it at least plausible for a social cognitive premise that views prejudicial or stereotype-laden cognitions as largely unavoidable for most humans. Those who've escaped being burdened by them are indeed lucky. Those who have not are indeed unlucky - but their lack of this kind of luck does not make them worthy of a postmodernist's condemnation. The racist's evil lives entirely in the degree to which he diminishes the liberties and well being of his victim - not in his automated or childhood-habituated cognitions. Still, these distorted cognitions under-gird the racist's malice, and thus we study them in hopes of one day discovering the most efficient way to unravel and re-train them (or developmentally deter them), pro-socially.

While I am dealing with exculpation and restoration, I should conclude by saying that what I have just described is a forgivable flaw in an otherwise masterful text; a text strongly recommended to new prejudice researchers and to all those teaching courses in racial prejudice. It is a heartening read in that it can make one see, believably, the potential for breakthroughs in prejudice-reduction techniques. The framework for prejudice reduction that the book finally provides is so comprehensive and diverse, like the chapters that prepare the reader for it, it is clear there is a place and a role for every social psychologist who desires such.

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- "Yourself"). But their first task within each trial (i.e., each word-pairing) was to identify the color of the letters the computer monitor used to present the second (i.e., descriptive) word. Prior studies (e.g., MacLeod and Rutherford, 1992) have found that increased activation of a word gets in the way of the color-naming task. In other words, the more a word is already activated in one's cognition at the moment, the slower one will be to correctly identify the color used to paint the word on the screen. This first "participant response" within each trial (the color-naming latency) is the measure of greater interest (i.e., not the subsequent "Yes" or "No" decision — which would more likely reflect impression-managed behavior).
- As mentioned, the manipulation in this experiment was how quickly the first word (i.e., the category to be judged, e.g., "Women" or "Yourself") was replaced by the descriptive word (presented in one of several basic colors). In this study, this time-span between the two words was manipulated to be either 240 ms or 2000 ms. In the former, this is so fast that it would be tapping into fully automatic processing (beyond conscious influence).
- Here's the disturbing finding from Locke and Walker (1999). The descriptive trait words were selected so as "to contain equal numbers that were and were not stereotypic of women — [furthermore] half of each trait word set was positive and half negative in emotional tone" (p.115). As had been found when sorting by prejudice against Aborigines (Locke, et al, 1994), only those in the high prejudice group showed higher activation of stereotypic words compared to non-stereotypic words. But in this study, the high prejudice group (i.e., highly sexist group) only showed relatively-increased activation of both sorts (positive vs. negative — as in flattering vs. derogatory) in the fast (240 ms) condition. In the 2000 ms condition (i.e., when given the opportunity to prepare to make a focused judgment), the high prejudice group only showed increased activation for the negative stereotypic words. Apparently, in highly-prejudiced subjects, it is only the negative stereotype content that is brought to the fore as a need for appraisal is anticipated.
2. The classic example from the Macrae, et al (1994) research is described in the following passage quoted from Carr & Atkins (in press). "In a classic study of rebound effects, participants saw a photograph of a skinhead (minority out-group) and wrote a paragraph describing the person (Macrae et al, 1994). Half the participants were pre-warned that social perceptions can be prejudiced by stereotypes and were asked to try and avoid this kind of bias. The other half of the participants received no such moral message; their condition was minimally constraining. Once the paragraph was written, all the participants were shown a second picture to evaluate, using a similar type of written task. What this study found was that the moral admonition not to stereotype did reduce stereotyping in the short-term, on the first task. However, this effect was not sustainable. By the time of the second task (constraint removed), there was a post-suppression rebound. The participants who had been previously constrained were now more likely to stereotype the out-group than their unconstrained counterparts. This included being more likely to sit apart from an actual member of the stereotyped out-group, in a pre-arranged meeting after the experiment ostensibly ended. Some of this rebound effect was undoubtedly due to self-consciousness. In a later study, simply seeing their own images in a laboratory-room mirror was sufficient to replicate these suppression-rebound effects (MacCrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1998). "It might be objected at this point that skinheads are a group that most people would feel relatively okay about stereotyping. In other words, skinheads are not the kind of group that viewers would normally fret about stereotyping (Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998). If this were totally correct, we should not expect to see rebound effects when the out-group is less inherently objectionable, for example if they represent a minority ethnic group or gender, or 'the poor.' In a recent study testing the rebound hypothesis in precisely each of these domains, suppression and rebound effects were again replicated (Lieberman & Förster, 2000)."

Footnotes

1. In this study, participants looking at a computer screen see just one word (e.g., "Women" or "Yourself"), and then see that one-word quickly replaced by a descriptive word — where just how quickly turns out to be the manipulation. Ultimately the participants would have been instructed to report as quickly as possible (e.g., by quickly pressing a "Yes" or "No" button) whether or not the second word (e.g., "compassionate") was descriptive of the first (e.g.,

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Public Goods and Private Wants: A Psychological Approach to Government Spending

Simon Kemp

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Reviewed by Paul Brown

How rational are people's views of government spending?

The process by which governments decide how much to spend on goods and services and what type to purchase has typically not been an area of great concern to psychologists. The book by Simon Kemp (a psychologist from the University of Canterbury) makes a strong case that psychologists should be involved in this area. In fact, by arguing for the inclusion of behavioural considerations in the process, Kemp is proposing that psychologists could (should?) do for government processes what Kahneman and Tversky did for decision research several decades ago.

In theory, a (simplified) democratic system should work as follows: Individuals have preferences for spending by government on goods and services, these preferences are translated into an elected government, the government considers the preferences and decides how best to allocate resources, the government collects funds from the people (via taxes) and then it provides the services that reflect individuals' preferences. The distribution of goods and services (how much each individual receives) is determined by the value society places on equity or equality (e.g., their social welfare function). For instance, society (via government policies) might have the goal of each individual receiving an equal share of the goods and services, even if they do not contribute equally (progressive tax system). Other systems might favour providing more services to those in greatest need or making the provision of services mirror the taxes paid. Thus, the task facing the government is to assess individuals' preferences for services they and others will receive, reconcile differences in preferences across individuals, determine the type and amount of services each individual should receive, and then purchase the goods and services to maximise society's welfare.

The first part of the book provides an overview of the approach taken by economists and political scientists to this issue. These sections are well written and provide a good summary of the relevant issues for those with little familiarity of these areas. From economics comes an understanding of the relationship between government spending and public goods. Kemp discusses the concept of merit goods – goods where society is better off having the government provide more goods than each individual would

purchase on his or her own (such as roading or defence) – in order to help define the type of services that governments should be providing. The chapter reviews evidence from economists on factors that influence the provision of these goods.

Kemp's discussion of the political scientist's contribution emphasises the process by which preferences are translated into government action via a democratic process. Kemp discusses the median voter model as way to represent the (murky) translation from voters' preferences to political parties to governmental decisions.

Both the economist's and political scientist's approaches assume that individuals are rational decision-makers. That is, these approaches assume that people know their preferences for government spending, will translate these preferences into political support, and that government will then reflect these preferences in its decisions. The remainder of the book is therefore dedicated to considering the validity of these claims. Chapters four through six discuss the difficulty in measuring preferences and in comparing utility across individuals. These chapters provide a useful overview of these differing approaches, bringing out the problems that arise when assessing preferences. But what makes the chapters particularly interesting is that Kemp attempts to tie the discussion back into government spending (it would have been easy to simply present a generic overview). Much of the evidence he reviews is his own work, undoubtedly due to the fact that there are few psychologists doing work in this area.

The remaining chapters are dedicated to examining whether government spending does indeed reflect individuals' preferences. Chapter seven deals with taxation, chapter eight with how well informed individuals are about what the government is purchasing, and chapter nine with what people would like the government to do. What emerges from these chapters is a consistent finding that people have little idea of what the government spends and how much they receive. Evidence is presented which suggests that there are some categories (such as defence) where the public believes that too much is spent and others (such as health) where more resources should be directed. More importantly, the chapters highlight findings suggesting that the process by which individuals make these assessments does not reflect the rational choice models of economics or political science.

Hence the book offers an important reason why this area might be viewed as ripe for psychologists. As with decision theory, the prevailing (normative) approach to explaining government spending does not stand up to the cold evidence of human behaviour. Psychologists would seem well placed to, for instance, identify the heuristics that individuals use to decide whether government spending should be increased or decreased (ample evidence is presented to suggest that these decisions are influenced by a number of different factors). Many of the goods provided by governments, such as welfare spending or roading, have

multiple and complex dimensions (especially when compared to the usual consumption items). This would seem fertile ground for psychologists to develop a behavioural model of individual preferences for a variety of government services.

But applying a psychological approach to government spending does require consideration of whether individuals' preferences should guide the distribution of resources. For instance, one might ask why it is important that individuals do not know how much is spent on welfare payments to the poor? Perhaps individuals care about the outcomes from government purchases (e.g., no homeless people on the streets and safe roads), but do not want to see money wasted on programmes that provide little value. Thus, the relevant question to address is not whether more should be spent on a given area, but whether the improvements in outcomes resulting from the increased spending will justify the expense. Making this assessment would require examining the merits of the individual programmes under consideration. But providing this level of detail to individuals about all possible government programmes is surely beyond the scope of most individuals' level of interest or tolerance (and a reason why we elect individuals to purchase on our behalf). Thus, in order for deviations from a rational decision model are important, it would seem necessary to ascertain whether adopting the individuals' stated preferences would truly improve the outcomes for society as a whole.

This point should not be taken as a criticism of the book, for Kemp acknowledges the trade-offs inherent in adopting an alternative political system (such as direct voting for measures). Rather, the fact that I found myself thinking of extensions and applications of this approach should be viewed as a sign of the value of the book. It introduces a new application of psychology and spurred interest in a previously unfamiliar area.

A final note: most of the examples in the book deal with the New Zealand government. This does not limit the appropriateness of the book for those outside of New Zealand, for the issues are relevant regardless of the context. But it does make it especially pertinent for students and researchers in this country.

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