

I am interested in social identity and how certain aspects of it lead to discrimination. The social identity theory developed by Henri Tajfel states that there are three aspects to identity: categorizing oneself into a group, adopting the group identity, and finally, comparing the group to other groups. I believe that discrimination stems from this final step of comparison.

This large-scale painting is a self-portrait based on my belief about where discrimination comes from. This painting holds a religious tone, one of me going through a nightmarish Bible story. The painting depicts a moral story. The flock of birds and the words that come out of the clam's mouth—"stronger together"—is meant to show how the "stronger together" mentality is detrimental to society.

Categorizing people into groups is the cause of discrimination. As social creatures, we have no ability to stop these labels. It is impossible to discard identity and impossible to stop groups from forming. It is helpful, however, to notice this bias; this extends to every single identity, chosen or born into. If we discard our predispositions and bias, we can live in a truly equal society.

Sean

Social Identity

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What are the effects of social identity in terms of comparison of in-groups and out-groups? Through this research I explored the psychology of comparison, the history behind it, and techniques that are used to compare. I researched the way we compare our in-groups to out-groups to make ours seem more favorable. The arguments used, like strawmen and false dichotomies, are created with group bias.

Introduction

Personally, I believe that though social identity does give some a sense of belonging, but it also has the effect of alienation and bigotry. I am definitely a group identifying person so I am no angel when it comes to this, and I don't entirely believe that identities should not exist but they are detrimental to society. Though I do not entirely believe the idea of white privilege (the white privilege in a sense of how whites have all ending privilege, but whites and everyone else legally have the same laws behind them. The minority groups have laws or systems (e.g. hate crime laws, or food stamps) helping them out. On top of that, socially, things are too convoluted to say that skin color is a universal litmus test of how oppressed or privileged somebody is. Also with the ideal of white privilege there is a societal aim of dealing with privilege by giving more identities privileges, fixing the complex problem by creating more discrimination). White people seem to have an upper hand in our society, at least from what I've heard but haven't witnessed because white privilege is conveniently hidden from the privileged. Besides my beliefs though, if I am to believe that social identity is wrong morally then I must accept that white privilege, at least on a group basis, is confirmed with social identity. Social identity can be used to argue white privilege, and it actually shows how with us having our own identity bias that everyone has their own respective privilege no matter what, where if you might be a "blank" and other people who describe themselves as a "blank" will prop each other up. In an experiment conducted by Yan Chen and Sherry Xin Li focused on in-group bias in the economic world, it showed that "when participants are matched with an in-group (an in-group is a group you are apart of) member, they show a 47 percent increase in charity concerns and a 93 percent decrease in envy. Likewise, participants are 19 percent more likely to reward an in-group match for good behavior, but 13 percent less likely to punish an in-group match for misbehavior. Furthermore, participants are significantly more likely to choose social-welfare-maximizing actions when matched with an in-group member. All results are consistent with the hypothesis that participants are more altruistic toward an in-group match." These results show the benefits of being part of an identity but also how harmful it is to outsiders. I believe that we should try as hard as we can as civilized beings to try to decouple ourselves from the protective bubble of a group. This is not meant to justify hatred towards people who have their special identities but to analyze the dangers of it and understand how we cannot get away from it. I noticed through seeing the dangers of it, I have made myself identify into some sort of anti-group group, if that makes sense, I could easily justify my dislike of people who identify in certain groups because I would believe that someone's group bias and group attachment made them more walking identities than individuals. This topic made me realize how easily one can become indoctrinated into an identity and, in my case, without even noticing it. I hope what is gained from this writing besides a distance from ones' identity and less of a focus on another's label, this is my route of reaching true equality. If I were to believe that humanity had a goal, then I would say that social identity does not further the goal of humanity. For I believe social identity only divides. Identity goes

into things like race, which are identities, we are born with and then there are the ones we choose like political affiliation, this categorizes us into groups. One can argue though that we were predisposed to certain beliefs or identities chosen based off our birth identities, the idea of white privilege can attest to this.

This division is the nature of identity with the categorization and bias against or towards differing identities. In a writing on the Social Identity theory done by Saul McLeod on the website Simply Psychology it states, “in order to increase our self-image we enhance the status of the group to which we belong. For example, England is the best country in the world! We can also increase our self-image by discriminating and holding prejudiced views against the out group (the group we don’t belong to). For example, the Americans, French etc. are a bunch of losers!”. It is seen throughout history with the bigotry of people of color with white and black people being separated as much as possible in America and in apartheid South Africa, it is seen in Nazi Germany with the bigotry of Jews with the ultra-nationalist party fearing that Jewish people would be the downfall of their country, and is seen in today’s political landscape with an almost civil war of democrats versus republicans. the categorization of groups is what causes this discrimination, a major example is the idea of race. I truly believe that we don't need race or identity, importance on race is why there is all this race discrimination.

Social identity breeds less critical thinking, and less self-judgment also due to the nature of social identity, the focus on what makes your identity better than everyone else’s. In an experiment conducted by Thomas F. Nelson Laird at the University of Michigan it states “students with more experiences with diversity, particularly enrollment in diversity courses and positive interactions with diverse peers, are more likely to score higher on academic self-confidence, social agency, and critical thinking disposition”. Though this writing above can be an argument for enforcing diversity quotas, and I don't believe that diversity should be enforced unless that diversity happens naturally instead of quotas (for example the UN is trying to have a quota for male and female leaders presented on the board). The lack of diversity of ideals for one example allows one not to question their beliefs. I’ve seen this first hand by being a culprit of it and I’ve seen the group bias in the political realm. A more recent example with this presidency of Trump versus Hillary. My friend groups who have chosen their own sides to support, Trump vs. Hillary vs. Don’t vote, have done this and so have I with the lack critical judgment on our beliefs. The bias is also a problem at my home school and social status.

People at the high school I go to group up based on political identity. They base friendships solely off shared beliefs. These groups would get so offended by an opposing position that they respond in bullying, not the bullying of throwing punches, but the kind where one party becomes the outcast of groups. These groups would be so blind as they would fear to question their perfect worldview or wonder what would cause someone to believe something different than themselves. It would just be chalked down to “they’re just a horrible person that’s why they disagree with me”. I am not saying that these people, Democrats in my example, are the only ones responsible for group identity and group bias at my school. I and everyone in the world has identity bias in a whole gradient of how strong the bias is. This is supported with the Social Identity theory written by Henri Tajfel, which states, “individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and that such identifications work to protect and bolster self-identity. The creation of group identities involves both the categorization of one’s “in-group” with regard to an “out-group” and the tendency to view one’s own group with a positive bias vis-à-vis the out-group. The result is identification with a collective, depersonalized identity based on group membership and imbued with positive aspects” Henri Tajfel also studied the

psychology of prejudice and how prejudice isn't caused by a personality predisposition but by categorization.

In the past years, the majority of the most noticeable examples I've had with people like this has been a democrat identifying person being horrible to someone who openly doesn't identify as one and is justified to be horrible by their righteousness. No harm towards anyone religious, but this group bias is extremely prevalent in religion, since the conception of faith. One can cite the flogging, mutilation and other torture methods used in the Middle Ages for the transgressors of Christianity, for example. Torture based on religion does not really happen anymore, but there is bigotry in religion versus religion or religion versus the non-religious. For example, the Westboro Baptist Church shows with its hateful reminders of how far group identity can go, with their pickets and signs that state things that I would not repeat in this essay depicting extreme homophobia, of course Westboro is an extreme example though. This style of bias is prevalent with every group identity, although it is way more turned down than the previous examples. In my experience at my home school, the Democrat group is on top. The Democrats would just smear everyone who has an opposing label in a false dichotomy of an anti-equality-women-hating-conservative-mega-Christian that is infatuated with the KKK. The beautiful thing about this topic is that we all have our untouchable social group bias, and through working on this topic, it helped me become more critical of my beliefs and helped me to be more open, it made me realize that maybe my beliefs are created out of convenience, and maybe other people's beliefs are too. It made me realize the connections it has with everything.

Research Path

I started research on how other cultures have affected south Florida, then it led to an interest in Native American culture and their impacts on America, specifically how the Tequesta Indians affected the town of Tequesta in southern Florida. That led to what causes cultural identity and what are the effects of it, and that finally got broadened into social identity. Through that broadening, I found how social identity has three major components: categorization, identification, and comparison. Also from the writing on the social identity theory written by Saul McLeod says, "We categorize objects in order to understand them and identify them." "We adopt the identity of the group we have categorized ourselves as belonging to. If for example you have categorized yourself as a student, the chances are you will adopt the identity of a student and begin to act in the ways you believe students act." "There will be an emotional significance to your identification with a group, and your self-esteem will become bound up with group membership." "Once we have categorized ourselves as part of a group and have identified with that group we then tend to compare that group with other groups. If our self-esteem is to be maintained our group needs to compare favorably with other groups." In this age of extreme identity politics, these examples are very noticeable in movements like the alt-right, the black lives matter movement, and feminism. Besides identity politics, these basic rules from the social identity can be applicable to any group. Through learning about these basic rules of social identity, the component of social identity that stood out to me the most was comparison. This seemed to be where the adverse effects of group mentality seemed to come from, for example, where the categorization and bias comes from, and where argumentative fallacies like strawmen and false dichotomies seemed to come from as tools to bolster one's identity. A strawman is a false argument set up to be refuted as if the person you are in the argument with agrees with the false argument for example person "A" says "they want less restrictions on guns" and person "B" says "they can't believe that person "A" is ok with school shootings" or flipped it would be

person “A” states “there should be more gun laws” and person “B” says “that person “A” hates freedom”. A false dichotomy is when something is unfairly skewed as an either or situation. For example, meat is murder and eating veggies is good, or abortion is murder and pro-life. Nearing the end, I started to get drawn off path and research about the history of strawmen, “a sham argument set up to be defeated,” and how it originally was called an Aunt Sally in England from a pub game. From the Oxford & District Aunt Sally Association website it shows the history of the game “A chicken was tied by one leg to a stake in the ground and the participants would then pay for a turn at throwing a small club at the bird. Whoever killed the bird got to take it home for dinner. If the bird's leg broke it would be supported on sticks until the bitter end”. Overall, I was interested in comparison and the effects of it.

Stereotypes

While researching the methods used in comparison of in-groups and out-groups I noticed that stereotypes were a constant in comparison and also in the three steps of social identity, so it led me to wonder how stereotypes affect your mentality. This led me to an experiment conducted by Pittinsky and Nalini Ambady based on stereotypes and susceptibility. The abstract for the experiment states “Recent studies have documented that performance in a domain is hindered when individuals feel that a sociocultural group to which they belong is negatively stereotyped in that domain.” in the experiment they found that when a participant's identity becomes salient during the test that it alters the outcome “When a particular social identity was made salient at an implicit level, performance was altered in the direction predicted by the stereotype associated with the identity.” The way the experiment was ran was participants were to take test “A”. Before test “A” was taken participants either take a pretest to make their identities salient or a different pretest that just asked generic questions where it didn't make their identities more salient. The pretest would hypothetically have an effect on how they score on test “A” based on how their identities stereotypes are towards intelligence or test taking skills. And the ones who took the pretest where it made their identities less salient were the control group. The results show “Participants in the Asian-identity-salient condition answered an average of 54% of the questions that they attempted correctly, participants in the control condition answered an average of 49% correctly, and participants in the female-identity-salient condition answered an average of 43% correctly.” These stereotypes factor with people differently depending on their different experiences. It is undeniable that stereotypes have an effect on us, but there is too much space in this experiment for human error, each participant might have different experiences with their respective stereotypes, and some might have more experience with the subject they were being tested on and the percentages that are so close to each other show this.

Conclusion

I ended coming to this topic with a little bit of a conscious bias towards my end point of view on this topic of social identity, I have always been biased against extreme social identity, which I believe it is harmful, but I never had evidence for this belief. I basically used this research to help confirm my belief on this particular subject and in the end I believe it didn't help me very much, but it helped me add more depth to my particular belief. Though it did help me confirm my ideals the research did show how as humans and social creatures by default because of the way we evolved, there is no escape from social identity and its comforts. Though it is inescapable I believe it's still destructive and I acknowledge that a world without identity would be something out of the book 1984, and I would never want to live in a world without identity

because the differences we have with each other are also what makes this world beautiful but when the difference cause non acceptance and bias it's not very helpful, any believer of the ideal of privilege can agree with me on this. In the end I am at the conclusion that too much social identity is dangerous and it not existing is just as horrible if not worse.

Final Thoughts

I truly believe that we don't need race or identity. Importance on race is why there is race discrimination. That might sound like a white privileged thing to say that we should stop being infatuated with our own races, but just because white Europeans created race some hundreds of years ago, causing all of this discrimination, doesn't mean I am responsible for the horrible things that have been done by other white people in the past. I have no white guilt. I was born this way and I didn't ask to be the way I am. Just because I'm a white male doesn't mean my input on social identity goes down to garbage because I'm not as oppressed as the few who are allowed to make points on this topic. Maybe I am completely wrong on this topic. As I've stated before, I have noticed that I have a particular bias towards my belief. Maybe this belief came about because it suits my lifestyle or identity better. Though I still hold my end belief it is still open to revisions or just completely giving this ideal up.

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