

Chapter One

Introduction

The current Presidential election in the United States highlights how difficult it is to avoid categorizing people according to large group affiliations. The three main contenders for the Presidential election were ascribed membership to a large group based on external features. The automatic categorization to race, gender, and age is unavoidable even though the categories may not be meaningful to the candidates themselves. Furthermore, each of the categories overlaps with the others within each individual. Still, the media speculated whether prejudices about any one of these categorical aspects of the candidates would be a factor in the election. The country seemed to be divided into constituencies that were identified according to race, gender, age group, religion, ethnicity, class, and so on. People had to ask themselves to what extent prejudice affects their choices or the choices of their neighbors. The prejudices being confronted were racism, sexism, ageism, and possibly prejudice against Moslems and Mormons, liberals and conservatives, immigrants and class differences. Yet the questions posed about prejudice were unclear. Would people cast their votes based on a prejudice against women, or African Americans, or older adults? That suggests a prejudice akin to hatred. Or, would people vote in support of the person who looked most like themselves or believed in the same values? Is that kind of favoritism a prejudice, and if so is it associated with a prejudice of hatred? The context forces people to notice large group categorizations. Even if they do not regularly think in terms of large group affiliations, people notice if they are alike or not with others in terms of large group memberships. The interrelationship of the individual and the large group is central in our effort to understand the underlying motivations of prejudice.

Each large group category along with the potential accompanying prejudice is related to an important aspect of identity. The example of the election shows how identity can become salient when others impose a category membership onto a person. It forces any individual to acknowledge aspects of himself or herself that are perceived by others to be part of his or her identity. This has the potential to impact the way people feel about themselves and may affect how they are treated by others. Individuals are also active in developing large group identity as a vital aspect of self. When a large group category is emotionally meaningful, it is part of a self-system, and, when salient, it affects perceptions and feelings.

A book about prejudice is fundamentally about identity, and therefore it is interrelated with our need to answer the question, “who am I?” This basic question organizes our environment as well as our internal experience of ourselves. Knowing who I am pertains to the question, “who else is like me?” At the macrosocial level this is known as the ingroup. Usually this ingroup is part of our identity, a dimension of the self-concept that social psychologists call collective identity. The instant an ingroup is formulated in the mind we become aware of who belongs to the ingroup and all others who do not. Those who do not belong to the ingroup make up the outgroup. These are the basic components upon which prejudice plays out in human relations. In simplest terms, the prejudice differentiates between two identity groups: an ingroup and an outgroup. The perspective that will be developed in this book is that prejudice is a result of an aberration in the relationship of the individual with his or her ingroup. The internal and external experience of the person associated with the developmental and contextual conditions that affect this process will be the focus of the following chapters.

Because prejudice is a longstanding human behavior, we can speculate that it has a purpose. Based on processes of evolution that favored conditions that promoted survivability, the brain process that categorizes was basic for the capacity of people to organize into groups. This tends to be a necessary condition of safety for many mammals (Bowlby, 1969). Given that mankind has developed as a potential predator upon its own kind, the groupings that were organized were to protect not only from animal predators, but also from other human groups. So much of human history reflects a struggle between human groups, that we can wonder whether it is an inevitable aspect of the human condition. If we concede that the problem of prejudice manifests in and between societies when individuals perceive themselves and others as large group members, then we must examine the conditions that facilitate collective or large group identity as a way to potentially understand what is occurring.

The focus on identity formation directs attention to developmental precursors that begin with the interaction of the infant and caregiver and ultimately

influence how the adult interacts with the large groups of his or her environment. The early phase of development in which the infant depends upon the caregiver for safety, as well as a beginning sense of self, is paralleled later in development when the individual interacts with large groups. At both stages this interrelationship is unavoidable and inevitable. Our capacity to attend to processes of separation and attachment is central to understanding these interactions. The young child struggles to manage security in terms of autonomy as an individual, while remaining attached to the caregiver. Similarly, the young adult manages autonomy as an individual while developing an attachment and sense of belonging with the large group. At both stages we can conceive of an optimal balance between separation and attachment needs.

RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE LARGE GROUP

A relational perspective has become central in psychoanalysis. The conscious and unconscious motivations of a relational theory of human behavior are geared toward facilitating secure, safe, and cooperative relationships with important individuals, from the initial caregivers to peers and intimate partners. Psychoanalysis offers a clinical method to address the irrational and destructive behavior that people engage in with each other. So far it has focused on interpersonal dynamics, and therefore has been unable to say much about the influence of large groups upon individuals. This was in large part responsible for the abandonment of psychoanalytic theory in the effort to address prejudice in the second half of the twentieth century.

By incorporating the large group as a potential object with which individuals establish an important relationship, it is possible to extend the parameters of psychoanalysis. A relational theory of prejudice sheds light on the potential convergence of ideas from psychoanalysis and social psychology. Psychoanalytic theories are primarily concerned with interpersonal relationships and unconscious processes that manifest in maladaptive interpersonal choices, or subjective states of vulnerability, and so on; however, psychoanalytic theories of prejudice do not discuss the ingroup and outgroup. This limits psychoanalytic efforts to address prejudice because models of interpersonal dynamics are applied to a large group phenomenon. The two levels of experience may have some similarities but are not identical, and they have different operating principles in important ways. On the other hand, social psychological efforts to address prejudice are primarily focused on the interaction of the individual and the large group. Studies of social cognitive psychology are interested in understanding how large groups influence people, and to some extent individual differences, but there is less attention to the

way large groups might interact with intrapsychic experience, or how psychopathology may interact with the large group.

THE LARGE GROUP IN THE MIND

W. R. D. Fairbairn (1952) elaborated a model of interpersonal relations that prioritized the relational nature of people. Given this starting point, he was able to define pathology as a process that impedes satisfying and cooperative relationships. His theory of mind included a way to understand how aspects of interactions with caregivers remain unconscious throughout development and affect the quality of interpersonal relations later in life. Some of Fairbairn's writing refers to societal structures, but he does not elaborate on a way to understand how one's relationship to the large group can be represented in the mind. His writing left us to determine whether the relationship between an individual and large group is in any way different from identifications with historical interpersonal relationships. This is an area that will be further developed and clarified in chapter 4.

Importantly, social psychological studies find that people can be influenced by large groups in different ways than they are by the interpersonal relationships in their lives. If this is a meaningful distinction, then the point reached in Fairbairn's theorizing does not account for the independent influence of large groups. The description of object relations that Fairbairn elaborated would lead to the formulation that large groups can be integrated into the mind as parental substitutes, and therefore the large group does not need to be attended to directly. From a clinical perspective, this would imply that by addressing the interpersonal context one is also addressing any large group issues. This was the best that could be formulated in Fairbairn's lifetime, but today we can integrate evidence from social cognitive psychology about the independent function of the large group in the mind. We could also elaborate additional ways to discuss the intrapsychic implications of collective identity, and in particular how these identifications are associated with prejudice.

By providing a conceptual scheme for the large group in the mind, we are able to account for conditions in which people behave in ways that are unexpected given their interpersonal histories. Object relationships traditionally are about the relationship with one other significant person. By conceptually offering a place in the mind for the large group, we are better able to speak about the relationship of the individual in the large group. I have called this object relationship a *social object* representation to provide a place for the large group in the mind. In essence the social object is the representation of the identification with the large group. This large group representation would

have to be interrelated with object representations of interpersonal relationships because they precede the individual's relationship to the large group. Yet, the large group in a person's life does have an independent impact on experiences of security and threat, self-esteem, and modes of interaction in the world.

For example, individuals who belong to a stigmatized large group may be affected by this membership in ways that are unrelated to the quality of the person's interpersonal history. This is especially relevant given that most societies are structured in hierarchical power relations between large groups (Dalal, 2002; Duckitt, 1992). Interpersonal relationships may develop in satisfying or unsatisfying ways that can change when functioning within the large groups. Another example could be a young woman who grew up in an abusive or neglectful environment. She may experience little support from her family, and opportunities to advance in her life may appear limited. This young person could find acceptance and a sense of belonging by joining a gang (or army, cult, religious organization, etc.). The strength of the social object will depend on the degree of vulnerability or threat she experiences. Threat can be developmentally shaped, or it can be environmentally present. The social object will have greater influence if the threat to her security is strong. In her case, relationships with fellow gang members may be rewarding, and self-esteem could be enhanced as she advances within the gang. The gang is a compensation for some vulnerability and helps ward off other psychological difficulties. Belonging to one gang automatically places the person in contrast to other gangs and may make one hypervigilant, needing to be aware of rival gang members in the environment. In a context that highlights the large group, we can say that collective identity is salient. In other words, it is conscious. When collective identity is salient, people think of themselves and others as large group members, and perceptions of self and other reflect ingroup and outgroup status.

PREJUDICE AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Processes of separation and attachment influence the potential of affiliation throughout development. Initially this is oriented toward the caregiver, but as development proceeds it involves interpersonal relations and, ultimately, the relationship the individual has with large groups. Healthy development is dependent upon an optimal balance between separation and attachment processes. Prejudice occurs when there is a loss of optimal balance in the capacity to be an autonomous individual while experiencing belonging to the large group.

The problem of prejudice can be understood to be a result of an *overidentification* between an individual and a large group. An overidentification eliminates the boundary between the individual and the large group. This is simultaneously associated with psychological defenses that eliminate the complexity of the environment such that ingroup and outgroup members are perceived as homogeneous. Defenses of splitting, rationalization, and denial are central to prejudice. The overidentification may be an outcome of developmental deficits or an environmental context that highlights large group conditions.

Fairbairn's model accounts for a pathology that blurs the boundary between the individual and large group in terms of primary identification. Pathology in individuals, according to Fairbairn, results from interpersonal experiences that do not facilitate what he called a mature dependence, leaving the infant and growing child to experience an infantile dependence with the caregiver. Fairbairn believes that dependence is lifelong and unavoidable. His theory implies that the degrees of dependence progress from lack of differentiation (primary identification) to mature dependence, which offers both more autonomy and connection. We know that young children can distinguish between ingroups and outgroups, and in adolescence the young person establishes relationships with large groups in the society in the course of identity formation. If primary identification continues and affects interpersonal relationships in adulthood, then we can presume that an overidentification with the large group is also possible. This would be a prototype of the prejudiced person who uses the large group as a compensation for the underlying vulnerability of infantile dependence. We can suggest that the individual who uses the large group as a compensation will be prejudiced regardless of environmental conditions that emphasize more or less salience of the large group. For this person the large group is always salient because there is no differentiation between the large group and the self.

This experience was put into words by the protagonist general in the film *Letters from Iwo Jima*. In a scene in which he is asked, "How would you feel if America and Japan were to enter the war?" he responds, "If this were to happen, I would have to serve my duty to my country. . . . I'd have to follow my convictions." Someone asks him, "Do you mean you'd have to follow your convictions or your country's convictions?" and he replies, "Are they not the same?" This is an example of the potential of a context to eliminate the boundary between the individual and the large group. War often does this on a massive scale. The prejudiced person who maintains prejudices regardless of context can be understood to have a pathology that Fairbairn would describe as one form of continuation of infantile dependence and is characterized by a primary identification with important people or groups. This in-

trapsychic model requires the addition of a social object representation to provide a place in the mind for the large group.

In the following chapters I will describe a model that seeks convergence between a relational psychoanalysis and social cognitive psychology. In the past fifty years the two disciplines have separated their efforts to address prejudice. One approach is primarily interpersonal and values the intrapsychic space that both is shaped by and affects the environment. The other approach recognizes that individuals always function within groups, both physically and psychologically. Yet the psychological implications of development that can impact how the individual responds to the environment is de-emphasized. Obviously the effort to combine the two perspectives may be able to enhance the overall effort. Erikson (1959) states that a psychosocial developmental theory would need to develop to fully appreciate the implications of identity. Given the relevance of identity to the study of prejudice, it is vital to seek conceptual schemes that converge across multiple disciplines.

This book introduces the compatibility between relational psychoanalysis and social cognitive psychology in the effort to address the problem of prejudice. A relational perspective in psychoanalysis and social cognitive psychology highlights that considerable overlap already exists between the two disciplines. In many ways, attention to this problem requires the knowledge of both disciplines in that prejudice is an outcome of developmental factors, intrapsychic process, interpersonal functioning, and societal conditions. The individual engages in prejudice at the point at which he or she comes into contact with society, and therefore prejudice is also dependent upon identity formation. The developmental precursors of identity formation and the contextual conditions that influence identity should not be studied separately, but rather they should be intertwined in a broadened effort to address the problem.

The chapters that follow can be read on their own; however, as a whole the chapters build upon each other, and conceptually, I hope, each enhances the previous to provide an overall model that engages the interdependence of both psychoanalytic and social cognitive perspectives.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the major theories of prejudice from the psychoanalytic and social psychological literatures. It will become clear how the development of the psychological study on prejudice began as a common effort across disciplines only to diverge in the latter half of the twentieth century. The development of the relational perspective in psychoanalysis offers a bridge with social psychology that can converge and potentially integrate knowledge from the two fields in order to further our effort to address prejudice.

In chapter 3 the foundation for a relational conceptualization of prejudice will be developed. A re-definition of prejudice will clarify the relational implications

for understanding this problem along with the developmental precursors of identity formation. The potential to integrate diverse literatures will become apparent in this chapter, bringing together broad discussions about separation and attachment processes, which will be shown to be central to managing identity and prejudice.

In chapter 4 a detailed discussion of object relations theory of prejudice is presented. Fairbairn's theory is brought into focus because he offers an intrapsychic model that is not readily available in a general psychoanalytic relational theory. Furthermore, Fairbairn's emphasis on dependence as a lifelong process is congruent with a social psychological perspective on the lifelong dependence on groups that individuals cannot avoid. An object relations model of large groups is presented that expands the range of inquiry for psychoanalysis and introduces the social object representation.

Chapter 5 presents an integration of attachment theory offered by Bowlby and Ainsworth, with the recent work in social psychology on attachment theory in romantic relationships and in relation to large group affiliations. Attachment theory is an important perspective to integrate into the discussion about prejudice because of the strong use of evolution theory. The underlying emphasis on survival is an important variable to consider when discussing the relationship of the individual and the large group. The relevance of threat is part of this perspective that helps explain the intensity of prejudice.

Chapter 6 follows up on the role of threat in prejudice. Individuals can experience both internal and external threat that is psychologically experienced as annihilation anxiety. This helps account for the extreme behavior encountered with prejudice. This chapter discusses the way that large groups may be part of the psychoanalytic process even if it is not acknowledged. The large group in the consulting room suggests that clinicians can attend to the societal dimension in the person by attending to collective identity. This is an area that is just beginning to acquire a language and conceptual relevance to clinical work.

Chapter 7 pulls it all together by offering a synthesis of the relational origins of prejudice. This chapter organizes the material discussed in the other chapters to provide a coherent overview of the interrelationship of psychoanalytic and social psychological perspectives. Although psychoanalysis is a discipline that works with people, usually one at a time, to repair pathology of interpersonal relations, the broader society is always part of the process. Similarly, although social psychological approaches tend to address normal processes that impact all individuals, the unconscious mind and the pathology of individuals should not be excluded. The most recent work on multiple identities in social psychology offers another potential to converge with the growing understanding of self-states. It will include an examination of the role of aggression in prejudice.

A century enriched by theories and diverse research about the psychology of prejudice has passed. Knowledge acquired from different disciplines in psychology can be integrated to form a coherent model that attends to multiple levels of experience simultaneously. Overlapping conceptual schemes in psychoanalysis and social psychology can orient the focus of inquiry about prejudice by using our knowledge of the experience of the large group within the individual.

