PREJUDICE AND PERCEIVED BELIEF DISSIMILARITY

CAMILLA S. SERUM and DAVID G. MYERS

Hope College, Holland, Michigan

Summary.—Rokeach, Smith, and Evans (1960) have contended that belief differences rather than race per se are crucial determinants of racial attitudes. Their research did not ascertain whether, in fact, highly prejudiced individuals do assume greater belief dissimilarities than low-prejudice individuals. The present research replicated the Rokeach, et al. (1960) study and confirmed the hypothesized relationship between racial prejudice and assumed belief dissimilarity.

A number of recent investigations have demonstrated the importance of attitude similarity-dissimilarity in determining interpersonal attraction (cf. Byrne, 1969). Rokeach, Smith, and Evans (1960), Byrne and Wong (1962), and Stein, Hardyck, and Smith (1965) have further shown that manipulation of belief similarity-dissimilarity has greater effect on attitudes toward Negroes than does race per se. Such data led Rokeach, et al. to conclude that "insofar as psychological processes are involved, belief is more important than ethnic or racial membership as a determinant of social discrimination" (1960, p. 135). But Rokeach did not ascertain whether or not prejudiced persons actually do assume that Negroes are less likely to agree with their own beliefs and values than are other whites.

Indirect evidence on this point is provided by Stein, et al. (1965) who found that attraction to an undescribed "Negro teenager" correlated .62 with responses to a Negro teenager with dissimilar beliefs and .15 to a Negro teenager like S. This finding that an undescribed Negro teenager tended to be rated as one unlike oneself is consistent with Rokeach's position. Byrne and Wong (1962) tested more directly the hypothesis that assumed dissimilarity is a function of racial prejudice, but with equivocal results which "obviously need replication."

The present research replicated the Rokeach, et al. (1960) investigation and also examined the hypothesis that for the prejudiced person "visible differences imply real differences" (Allport, 1954, p. 131).

METHOD.

The Rokeach, et al. (1960) instrument was administered during a regular class session to 35 white high school students, ages 15 to 19 yr., in a small midwestern town. Ss rated their attraction to pairs of stimulus individuals on a 9-point scale. Using all combinations of race (white and Negro) and belief (for

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2Now at the University of Alabama.
or against eight different issues) resulted in 48 stimulus pairs. An example of each type is presented below:

A Negro who is pro-labor unions 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
A white person who is pro-labor unions 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
A white person who is anti-labor unions 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
A Negro who is anti-labor unions 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

After estimating their friendliness toward each stimulus person, Ss indicated their own beliefs on the eight issues. Five scores were derived from each S's responses: (1) Race (R) difference score: the sum of differences in ratings given whites and Negroes on pairs with belief held constant; (2) Total race (TR) difference score: the total difference in ratings given whites and Negroes over all 48 stimulus pairs; (3) Belief (B) difference score: the sum of differences in ratings given to those who agree vs those who disagree with S on pairs with race held constant; (4) Total belief (TB) difference score: the total difference in ratings given to those who agree vs those who disagree over all 48 stimulus pairs; (5) Race-belief (RB) difference score: the total difference in ratings given to pairs in which both race and belief are varied.

Following the Rokeach instrument, Ss were also asked to indicate who actually was more likely to favor and oppose each of the eight issues. For example:

Which is more likely to be for labor unions?
---white person ---Negro ---undecided

Which is more likely to be against labor unions?
---white person ---Negro ---undecided

By comparing these responses with each S's own beliefs it was possible to derive a perceived belief difference (PBD) score. PBD is a composite score defined as the total number of whites perceived to agree and Negroes perceived to disagree minus the total number of whites perceived to disagree and Negroes perceived to agree. Undecided responses were not scored.

As an independent measure of prejudice, Harding and Shuman's Reactions Questionnaire (cf. Robinson, Rusk, & Head, 1968) was administered during the previous class period and scored using Rubin's (1967) code.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the Pearsonian intercorrelations of the various measures. The table indicates that TR and TB, the total measures of race and belief prejudice derived over all item pairs, correlated highly with Rokeach's R and B measures derived over just 16 item pairs each. It may also be noted that the race
prejudice measures derived from the Rokeach questionnaire do not correlate with the more subtle Harding-Shuman (H-S) scale, which apparently taps a different dimension of racial prejudice.

Table 1 indicates high correlations of race-belief (RB) scores with belief prejudice scores but not with race prejudice scores. This replicates the Rokeach, et al. (1960) finding that belief differences, and not race, predict attraction when both race and belief are varied.

Table 1 further indicates that the tendency to perceive Negroes as having dissimilar beliefs (PBD) is a significant predictor of ethnic prejudice as measured independently by the Rokeach measures (R and TR) and by the Harding-Shuman scale. The importance of the present research is its replication of the Rokeach, et al. (1960) study and its demonstration (with Rokeach's materials) that greater belief differences are, in fact, perceived by prejudiced whites.

Such correlational evidence merely describes a characteristic of prejudiced persons. It does not ultimately explain the psychological origins of prejudice since one must still ascertain why prejudiced persons assume greater belief dissimilarity than nonprejudiced persons. Practically, however, the data suggest a basis for understanding why equal status interracial contact lends to reduce prejudice. As Stein, et al. (1965) and Pettigrew (1969) have noted, such conditions favor the perception of belief congruence and hence the reduction of cognitive supports for prejudice.

REFERENCES


It should be noted that four of Rokeach's eight belief issues were race-related (e.g., concerning desegregation). The positive correlations between PBD and prejudice may thus, in part, reflect a tendency for prejudiced whites to perceive Negroes accurately as more likely than whites to disagree with their prejudiced beliefs.


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