

Theories of Inequality in Race

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the sociological topic of prejudice, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Theories of Prejudice
 - a. Scapegoat Theory
 - b. Authoritarian Personality Theory
 - c. Culture Theory of Prejudice
 - d. Conflict Theory of Prejudice

1. THEORIES OF PREJUDICE

Prejudice is part of American society, and other societies as well. Sociologists strive to understand what it is about prejudice that makes it so tenacious. Why does it appeal to people in some regard, and why does it persist through time? There are four theorized viewpoints in which to view to prejudice:

- Scapegoat Theory
- Authoritarian Personality Theory
- Culture Theory of Prejudice
- Conflict Theory of Prejudice

1a. Scapegoat Theory

Scapegoat theory is one theory developed to explain the persistence of prejudice in society. It involves unfairly blaming someone else for a wrong, and typically the one labeled as scapegoat has less power and little ability to resist the negative accusations.

IN CONTEXT

In the context of economics, you may have heard certain people complain, “All those immigrants are taking our jobs. If it wasn't for them, we'd have jobs and be wealthy. Things were better before they came along.” This kind of language is an example of unfairly scapegoating a group of people for a set of problems. Scapegoat theory is a way to explain prejudice at a level of group analysis, taking a ‘we vs. them’ viewpoint.



TERM TO KNOW

Scapegoat Theory

A theory that holds that people blame another person or group for their problems, typically the powerless, when they cannot direct their anger at the appropriate agent.

1b. Authoritarian Personality Theory

Authoritarian personality theory, developed by prominent social theorist Theodor Adorno, brings prejudice down to the individual level and situates it in an individual's personality development across the life course. This theory explains prejudice on the individual level in terms of one's personality, as the result of their traits, upbringing, and strict domineering parenthood. People with authoritarian personalities are more rigid in their thinking, meaning that they see the world primarily in black and white, yes and no, good and bad. Their morals are more fixed, with less of a gray area in the world.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Some people are inherently superior, and some are inferior. Some people are successful, while others are unsuccessful. This is always right, and this is always wrong, no exceptions. You, by virtue of your position, are superior relative to others.

Authoritarian personalities tend to see the world in this fashion, and place groups of people in categories according to their rigid outlook on the world, organizing their prejudice accordingly.



TERM TO KNOW

Authoritarian Personality Theory

A theory of prejudice that sees prejudice as the result of personality development throughout the life course.

1c. Culture Theory of Prejudice

Shifting focus from the individual to the forces that impact the individual, the **culture theory of prejudice** states that people live in a culture of prejudice and that some degree of prejudice is found in everyone. This implies that you learn prejudice growing up within a specific culture, and in this way, prejudice is culturally transmitted through the generations. It has been found that minority group members are prejudiced as well, and that they express similar prejudices as the ones that whites express against categories of people.



BIG IDEA

Culture theories of prejudice involve group dynamics and infer humans' need to conform to groups, to be a part of a group and identify another party as an outsider of the group. Therefore, this theory holds that prejudice is rooted in culture.



TERM TO KNOW

Culture Theory of Prejudice

A theory of prejudice that holds that we live in a culture of prejudice and that prejudicial attitudes are transmitted through generations culturally.

1d. Conflict Theory of Prejudice

Recall that conflict theory is the theorization of society that sees society as an arena of conflict, and holds that conflicts over the distribution of resources in society cause change in society. Similarly, the **conflict theory of prejudice** views prejudice as rooted in class, and by this theorization, prejudice is a tool that people in power can use to justify their position and entitlements.



TERM TO KNOW

Conflict Theory of Prejudice

A theory of prejudice that sees prejudice as rooted in class, and that people in power use prejudicial attitudes to justify their position and entitlements.



BIG IDEA

It is important to note that the four theories of prejudice are not completely separate, distinct, and compartmentalized. In fact, they are interwoven, and a person's prejudice cannot be explained by any one of them alone. You'd likely need all four theories to explain the nuance of prejudice, so think about them as interrelated aspects that all contribute to an explanation of prejudice in individuals and broadly, in society.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about four **theories of prejudice**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



TERMS TO KNOW

Authoritarian Personality Theory

A theory of prejudice that sees prejudice as the result of personality development throughout the lifecourse.

Conflict Theory of Prejudice

A theory of prejudice that sees prejudice as rooted in class, and that people in power use prejudicial attitudes to justify their position and entitlements.

Culture Theory of Prejudice

A theory of prejudice that holds that we live in a culture of prejudice and that prejudicial attitudes are transmitted through generations culturally.

Scapegoat Theory

A theory that holds that people blame another person or group for their problems, typically the powerless, when they cannot direct their anger at the appropriate agent.