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From Prejudiced People to Prejudiced Places:  
A Social-Contextual Approach to Prejudice

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*We often consider prejudice as a psychological condition lodged in single individual minds. To understand the total psychosocial complex of prejudice we need also to take into account situational and society factors.*

-Gordon Allport (1966)

Imagine Karen's first day as a newly minted assistant professor—arriving at her office in the Math department at a prestigious university. Filled with excitement, she unpacks her boxes and organizes the space. A few hours in, she walks down the hall toward the women's restroom—but she can't find it. She stops at the administrative assistant's office and is told that, while there is a men's restroom on every floor, the only women's restroom is in the basement, two floors down. How should she interpret this? Why is there only one restroom for women? And of all places, why is it in the basement?

One interpretation is that people in the Math department are sexist—that they don't value women in the field. The lack of women's restrooms may be especially threatening because it exists alongside cultural stereotypes that impugn women's abilities in math and the historical underrepresentation and exclusion of women in Math and Science fields. In light of these facts, this physical cue may seem to confirm the worst—a prejudice against women. Embedded in this attribution is an assumption that discriminatory circumstances—such as requiring women to go out of their way to use the restroom—betray prejudiced attitudes within individuals.

But this is not the only possible interpretation. A little research might reveal that the Math building is one of the oldest on campus—built in the late 1800s when

the original campus was constructed. At the time, there were *no* women faculty members. The only women who worked in the Math department were secretaries, and they worked in the basement. So including a women's restroom there—and only there—was logical and sensible. The local and historical context surrounding the cue provides a different perspective—one of practicality and pragmatism that does not require an attribution of prejudice or animus against women. Today, the department would be well advised to accommodate the changing needs of faculty and staff. But the existence of this identity-threatening cue may not necessarily signal prejudice on the part of people currently working in the math department.

Surprisingly, social psychology—a field that has at its core the press of the situation in shaping human behavior (Asch, 1952; Ross & Nisbett, 1991)—tends to locate prejudice in individuals' internal attitudes and evaluations. When people behave in a prejudiced manner, we tend to view the act as reflecting a bias within them, which is relatively stable across interaction partners and situations. To investigate this bias, we have developed state-of-the-art tools to measure individual differences in prejudice—from subtle explicit measures, to implicit reaction time measures, to brain and hormonal responses. Thus, we can assess how much explicit, implicit, and perhaps even unconscious prejudice a person carries with them. Social psychologists have further investigated how people's scores on prejudice measures predict their thoughts, emotions, and behavior in intergroup settings (e.g., Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). When researchers strive to create interventions to reduce bias and discrimination, the typical goal is to reduce the amount of prejudice that exists within individuals, for instance by recreating

approach tendencies toward minority groups (e.g., Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen & Russin, 2000). Only rarely considered is how situations give rise to, facilitate, or prevent acts of prejudice, or how reshaping environments could reduce or eliminate them.

Research that locates prejudice within individuals is unquestionably important. But, we suggest, an exclusive focus on individual differences neglects a broader view of prejudice. This broader view would place more emphasis on the perspectives and experiences of targets of prejudice. From a majority perspective, problems of prejudice may seem to stem from “prejudiced people” who stereotype or discriminate against minority group members. Who is racist? How can their racism be reduced or eliminated? From this perspective, identifying the psychological and biological mechanisms that underlie a person’s level of prejudice is a “natural” means towards reducing prejudice and promoting a more just society.

But from the perspective of targets of prejudice (often minority group members), biology and reaction times matter less than whether one is treated with dignity and respect. These experiences derive from both people and from situations. Extant research has shown that settings can—purposefully or incidentally—create disparate experiences and treatments for some social groups relative to others. Drawing in part on stereotype and social identity threat research (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002), we argue that our current state of knowledge, built over decades of careful study, allows us to specify particular kinds of contexts and environments as “prejudiced.” By this we mean that certain contexts have the predictable effect of creating and recreating inequality of experience and outcomes

based on individuals' social group membership—advantaging people from some social groups and disadvantaging people from other social groups.

Consistent with this framework, we argue for a conceptualization of prejudice as something that people and contexts *do*, not just the type of person someone *is* (Markus & Moya, 2010). This interpretation shifts our view of prejudice from a static and fixed property of individuals to one that is active, dynamic and sourced from both people (e.g., their attitudes and beliefs) and the contexts that they inhabit. In fact, according to the social-contextual model of prejudice, to fully understand the effect that people's attitudes have on others, one must consider the contexts within which the actor and the target are embedded.

This conceptualization is more in line with how targets actually experience prejudice. From the target's perspective, prejudice is a dynamic process of interaction—of treatment, exclusion or disrespect—that occurs against a cultural, historical and situational background (Markus & Moya, 2010). Privileging one source of prejudice to the neglect of others prevents a full and complete understanding of how and why group disparities persist. We suggest that if one ultimate goal of stereotyping and prejudice research is to better understand and remedy barriers to equal opportunity and access, then a broader view of the antecedents of prejudice is helpful—one that considers how both people *and* places differently shape the experiences and opportunities of majority and minority group members.

This social-contextual approach differs from approaches that conceptualize prejudice as an attitude and discrimination as the behavior that stems from such

prejudiced attitudes. While the “prejudice-as-attitude” model is important for understanding individual differences, we suggest that it can nevertheless forestall a serious consideration of the social context as an antecedent of discriminatory outcomes. First, by highlighting prejudiced attitudes as the primary antecedent of discriminatory behavior, the attitude model forgoes the possibility that discriminatory outcomes can occur without prejudiced individuals, a point to which we will return later. Second, with a primary focus on attitudes as the source of prejudice, it is easy to forget that targets do not actually experience actors’ attitudes per se. For example, a target does not experience an actor’s IAT score. It is only within particular contexts that those attitudes become linked to behavior—and it is the resulting behavior that affects targets. Third, when the attitude model considers the role of situations, they are thought to either provide opportunities for acting on prejudiced attitudes or as a barrier to prevent this. Relative to this model, we argue for a much richer role of situations. According to the social-contextual model of prejudice, environments don’t just create or prevent opportunities for the expression of prejudice; they can also create bias all on their own. In this chapter, we are concerned with exploring how and when individuals can receive differential treatment or have differential social and psychological experiences as a consequence of their membership in a social group. We contend that such unequal outcomes stem from both people and places.

A contextual theory of prejudice invites us to consider person, situation, and person-by-situation predictors of biased behaviors and biased outcomes. From this perspective, individual attitudes matter, but they should be considered in context.

Prejudice can result from individuals' attitudes when they are linked with behavior, and also from settings that are set up in ways that produce disparities between social groups. Conceptualizing prejudice—even more subtle, implicit, and unconscious forms of prejudice—as something that exists within individuals without recognizing the role of context risks committing a version of the fundamental attribution error. It risks giving undue weight to people's internal attitudes and dispositions in shaping their behavior to the neglect of important situational variables.

In this chapter, we first discuss some of the pitfalls of considering prejudice and discrimination as emanating solely from individuals and advocate for a broader consideration of the role of situations as causes of inequality. We provide several key examples of prejudiced contexts—situations that predictably produce systematically biased outcomes along social group lines. Finally, we draw from the literature to suggest how consideration of situations could inform novel remedies—changes in social environments—to reduce or eliminate discriminatory outcomes.

### **Prejudice in Individuals**

Many contemporary social and political commentators argue that attitudinal prejudice is a thing of the past—no longer an important social issue (e.g., Taranto, 2010; *The Economist*, 2008; Remnick, 2008). Some express exasperation with social scientists in general and with social psychologists in particular who, it seems, focus their research agendas on discovering new and evermore subtle forms of bias within individuals, even as indicators show that prejudice has declined sharply over time. While it is clear to us that people continue to hold prejudiced attitudes at the

explicit and implicit levels and that, under certain conditions, these attitudes result in overt and subtly biased behavior, we believe that this critique has some merit. Indeed, social psychology has shifted from the macro to the molecular in the study of bias. Once taking what people had to say at face value—via self-report measures of prejudice and stereotyping—today we employ extraordinarily covert methods to detect prejudice. From reaction time tasks to cardiovascular, hormonal, and brain activation measures, our methods reflect not only the development of dual-process models of attitudes (Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Cunningham, Preacher, & Banaji, 2001; Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000) but also the assumption that what people say may not be fully accurate—that self-reports, especially those related to sensitive topics like prejudice, are polluted by political correctness concerns—and that indirect assessments provide better assessments of the “real” levels of prejudice within a person (Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980; Nosek & Hanson, 2008; Uhlmann, Poehlman, & Nosek, 2012). There is no doubt that this approach has yielded important dividends in understanding and predicting human behavior (e.g., Dasgupta, 2004; Greenwald et al., 2009; McConnell & Leibold, 2001; Ziegert & Hanges, 2005). But the emphasis on covert attitudinal measures, especially in the absence of attention to contextual factors, represents a doubling-down of the field’s bet on an individual-difference approach to prejudice. We worry that this primary focus obscures a potentially larger truth—that many people sincerely want to be non-prejudiced and, in important ways, are non-prejudiced (Plant & Devine, 2009). In many cases, addressing the situations that yield prejudiced behavior may be a



more effective means for understanding and reducing social inequality than efforts to further detect and mitigate covert prejudicial attitudes.

Social psychology has long conceptualized prejudice as a property of individuals. In the early and middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most American psychologists considered prejudice a defect of personality fueled by beliefs about the biological inferiority of racial minorities and manifested in blatant and overt expressions of racial animus (e.g., Adorno, Frenkel-Bruswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Bogardus, 1928; Katz & Braly, 1935). Ironically, this view coincided with the laws and structures of Jim Crow America where situations systematically disadvantaged racial minorities. Over the past 50 years, the United States has seen a dramatic reduction in self-reports of explicit prejudice (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997; Hochschild, 1981; 1995). As the endorsement of prejudice and racial stereotypes began to fall, social and cognitive psychologists began to suggest that prejudice was, in fact, a normal feature of human social cognition and thus potentially present in all people (Allport, 1954). Indeed social identity researchers demonstrated that even in minimal group contexts—where group membership was randomly assigned and essentially meaningless—intergroup biases emerged (e.g., Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971).

As self-reports of explicit prejudice fell further, social psychologists aiming to explain enduring racial disparities suggested that people's negative racial attitudes had not disappeared but had instead, taken a more subtle and nuanced form (Duckitt, 1992; Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). For instance, modern racism theorists have suggested that certain conservative political views often serve as cover for

prejudiced attitudes (McConahay, 1986; Sears, 1988). Today, most Americans espouse egalitarian ideals regarding race and consider themselves to be nonprejudiced (Dovidio, 2001). But psychologists have demonstrated that aversive and implicit forms of racism persist, in which people espouse egalitarian beliefs but remain ambivalent towards racial minorities, ostensibly because they harbor implicit, and potentially unconscious negative attitudes toward people of color (Son Hing, Li, & Zanna, 2002; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Katz & Hass, 1988). There is no doubt that these subtle forms of racism are critical to understand as they likely affect social interactions, experiences, and outcomes of racial minorities today (Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003).

While there are several theories of contemporary racial bias, all posit that as society has become less tolerant of blatant or overt prejudice, people have become motivated to appear unbiased on explicit racial attitude scales. Thus more subtle and implicit measures have been created to index this modern conceptualization of racial attitudes (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Jones & Sigall, 1971). However, when we conceptualize prejudice as hidden within individuals, the way to create an egalitarian society is to detect the prejudice, sort biased from non-biased people, and change the biased people or remove them altogether from the environments that we assume are themselves unbiased. This seems a suboptimal strategy if we want to achieve a fully integrated, egalitarian society. As noted above, we do not doubt that people have modern, ambivalent, and implicit forms of prejudice and that these forms have important consequences. But we contend that the contemporary focus on internal attitudes—whether explicit or

implicit—as a cause of biased behavior and biased outcomes limits our understanding of the causes of inequality. What are some of the limits of the prejudice-as-attitude model?

First, extant research shows that attitudes are weak predictors of behaviors, especially when they are highly general and untied to the specific behavior at hand (see Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005 for a review). Prejudice, as measured in much contemporary research, for example through feeling thermometers or implicit reaction time measures, is a paradigmatic example of a generalized, unspecified attitude. We should be impressed when individual-difference measures of generalized prejudice predict specific forms of bias even modestly or inconsistently (Greenwald et al., 2009).

It is because of the weakness of attitudes as predictors of behavior in general, that in many other contexts social psychologists have emphasized the role of the situation. Indeed, classic studies in our field pit individual differences against situational forces to illustrate the relative power of situations (e.g., Darley & Batson, 1973). Drawing on this intellectual tradition, social psychology's contribution to the understanding and solution of major social problems often emphasizes situational variables. Consider, for example, Americans' environmental awareness and recycling behavior. Do Americans recycle now more than ever (EPA, 2010) because clever marketers have persuaded them to be tree-hugging environmentalists? Far from it. Instead, descriptive norms have become established in local communities and, at the same time, channel factors facilitate the desired behaviors (e.g., Allcott, 2011; Laskey & Kavazovic, 2010). Some channel factors include financial incentives

and penalties such as “pay-as-you-throw” programs that charge households for the weight of their garbage while recycling services remain free. Others like city-funded recycling receptacles and free pick-up services have reduced the barriers and inconveniences of recycling. (Bator & Cialdini, 2000; Cialdini, 2003; Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1991; Davis, 2011; EPA, 2012).

Researchers have argued that the rise of anti-prejudice norms has similarly reduced the expression of prejudiced attitudes and behaviors (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Crandall & Stangor, 2005). Likewise, research that manipulates prejudice norms can bring significant benefits to attitudes and behavior (e.g., Crandall, Bahns, Warner, & Schaller, 2011; Crandall, Eshleman, & O’Brien, 2002). However, as people conform to these norms in public, it is possible that many will internalize them and they will become part of people’s identities, potentially with lasting effects (Newcomb, Koenig, Flacks, & Warwick, 1967; Plant & Devine, 2009; Walton & Cohen, 2011b). Indeed, research suggests that *appearing* nonprejudiced may not be the central motivation of many people—rather, many people are genuinely motivated to *be* nonprejudiced (Plant & Devine, 1998; 2009). Even without an audience and when people report their motivations anonymously, people have largely internalized anti-prejudice norms and endorse anti-prejudice views. In addition, people who are internally motivated to be nonprejudiced are eager to eliminate racial bias within themselves or their behavior even if others won’t be privy to these efforts (Plant & Devine, 2009). If leveraged properly, perhaps contextual norms coupled with appropriate channel factors could dampen or

extinguish the outward expression of prejudiced behavior and facilitate the internalization of nonprejudiced identities and behaviors even further.

A second limit of conceptualizing prejudice as a quality of individuals is that it can obscure situations in which biased outcomes occur in the absence of prejudicial attitudes. One of the lessons of stereotype threat (Steele, 1997; Steele et al., 2002) is that members of negatively stereotyped groups can experience psychological threat and suffer along important and socially meaningful dimensions as a consequence of subtle situational cues—and this can occur even when other people in a setting are not prejudiced. A White experimenter who represents a test as evaluative of students' intellectual ability can cause a Black student to experience stereotype threat while holding no animus against Blacks (see Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Similarly, locating the women's restroom in the basement of a Math department can cause women to feel that they don't belong in that environment, even if others in the department hold no animus against women. Thus, seemingly neutral situations can trigger threatening or hostile meanings for some groups but not others causing inequality in important outcomes. Well-meaning individuals—even people who endorse egalitarian attitudes—can create such situations without awareness of the unequal effects the settings produce or how to remedy this bias. The absence of attitudinal prejudice does not mitigate the real harm caused to minority individuals—the harms of stereotype threat are no less real by virtue of the fact that they can be caused by non-prejudiced (as well as by prejudiced) people. Understanding prejudice as something that can attach to environments and contexts

as well as to people may open our eyes to these forms of bias and suggest novel, theory-based remedies for mitigating inequality.

Third, as mentioned above, primary emphasis on prejudicial attitudes as the cause of bias readily leads people (often majority group members) to be labeled as “prejudiced” or “racist” and to be apprehensive about this prospect. While the threat of such a stigmatizing label may keep some prejudiced individuals “in check,” it relies on external motivators such as guilt and shame, which are relatively ineffective in inducing positive long-term behavior change (e.g., Thomaes, Bushman, Stegge, & Olthof, 2008; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996; Hooge, Nelissen, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2011; Kochanska, Barry, Jimenez, Hollatz, & Woodard, 2009). And while guilt and shame certainly play a role in behavior change (Amodio, Devine, & Harmon-Jones, 2007; Monteith, Mark, & Ashburn-Nardo, 2010), relying primarily on these motivators can backfire by increasing intergroup anxiety and causing people to avoid intergroup contact altogether (Barlow, Louis, & Terry, 2010; Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008; Plant & Devine, 2003). Indeed, during interracial contact, a significant concern of White individuals is being labeled racist (Richeson & Shelton, 2007; Goff et al., 2008). This concern is exacerbated by a conception of prejudice as an internal, stable property of individuals. Indeed one significant consequence of this mainstream, fixed theory of prejudice is the avoidance of intergroup contact. The belief that people who “have” prejudice cannot easily change it reduces people’s motivation to seek opportunities for interracial interaction (Carr, Dweck, & Pauker, 2012). Revealingly, Carr and colleagues call these avoidant behaviors “prejudiced behavior without

prejudice” because the effect occurs, regardless of people’s scores on measures of racial prejudice (Carr et al., 2012).

Acknowledging how prejudice can adhere to contexts as well as to people may reduce majority group members’ fears of being labeled during interracial interactions and facilitate more positive intergroup interactions. Teaching people about contexts that produce biased outcomes may expand people’s definition of prejudice and encourage greater perspective taking and improvement in intergroup attitudes and behaviors (see Dweck, 2000; Murphy, Richeson, & Molden, 2011). Indeed, a focus on how environments can be changed may provide a common goal among well-meaning White individuals and ethnic minorities to create unbiased settings. Given the power of self-consistency processes such as cognitive dissonance, these behaviors themselves may lead to reductions in prejudicial attitudes creating a self-sustaining cycle of egalitarian behaviors and attitudes (see Allport, 1954; Brannon, Walton, & Spencer, 2012).

### **Prejudice in Contexts: A Social-Contextual Approach to Prejudice**

Of course, not all social-psychological theories of prejudice and discrimination focus on individual differences; several highlight the power of context. Realistic group conflict theory (Duckitt, 1994; Sherif, 1966) and relative deprivation theory (Merton, 1938; Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, Meertens, van Dick, Zick, 2008) posit that prejudice is contingent on situational and economic factors. According to these models, limited resources increase the likelihood that prejudice will emerge as people compete and experience feelings of scarcity and relative deprivation. Other theories contend that the outward expression of prejudice is

guided by social norms in the local context. For example, the justification-suppression model of prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003) posits that to understand when and why prejudice emerges, one must examine the local context to decipher prevailing social norms regarding the appropriateness of negative attitudes and expressions toward particular groups. Likewise, Devine's automatic and controlled theory of prejudice (1989) suggests that, while people internalize knowledge of group-based stereotypes through cultural socialization, local norms and individuals' motivation and resources can modulate the use of stereotypes in people's judgment and behavior. While these theories posit that prejudice is a characteristic of individuals, they also contend that the expression of prejudice depends on situational factors. An implication of these theories is that changing situations may reduce the incidence of bias.

Like these theories, we believe that individuals can hold biases and stereotypes that influence their judgment and behavior when the situation permits their expression. But our argument goes beyond these theories by suggesting that environments can cause inequality without the presence of prejudiced people. Next, we point to some illustrative examples of prejudiced contexts that directly and systematically disadvantage some groups relative to others.

One way that contexts can be prejudiced is that they present different, more threatening meaning and construals for some social groups, but not for others. Because of these different meanings, some groups must engage more effortful psychological processes than others, which in turn can hamper their outcomes. As mentioned above, research on stereotype and social identity threat has found that



women and people of color routinely face situations where their group is negatively stereotyped or numerically underrepresented. These situational cues create a sense of psychological and physiological vigilance (Murphy et al., 2007) and tune attention towards other cues of inclusion and belonging in social environments, often at the expense of sustained motivation and performance (Walton & Cohen, 2007, Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009). Men and Whites simply do not face such negative and pervasive stereotypes; as a consequence, they do not grapple with the same psychological burdens. We consider situations like these prejudiced. They systematically disadvantage individuals from one social group relative to others—exerting a greater psychological burden and influencing basic psychological processes that, in turn, cause group-based differences on important outcomes like motivation, test performance, and career aspirations. Aspects of the environment such as the number of identity mates in a setting, or the degree to which people in the environment befriend newcomers may have a greater meaning for people concerned about potential exclusion or isolation due to stigmatized social group membership. While it may not be prejudiced—in the traditional sense of the word—to benefit from having people from your ingroup dominate a setting, it nonetheless creates inequality in construal, experience, and psychological functioning along group lines.

Another way contexts can be prejudiced is if they require members of one group to give up, change, or conceal aspects of themselves in order to be accepted. Imagine being a woman in a computer science class comprised of mostly men. The examples provided in class and the topics of conversation in study groups center on

things of interest to the majority of the class—bonding experiences like all-night coding binges, forgetting to shower, and being a geek. And while men and women attend the exact same class—a class that, on its face, has nothing to do with gender, the situation can produce disparate experiences for men and women and affect their performance and persistence in the field (Cheryan et al., 2009; Margolis & Fisher, 2002). To belong in an environment like this, women may need to sacrifice part of their feminine identity; similar sacrifices are not necessary for men to “fit in” (Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004). Men’s identity simply “fits” the field—as though the field were constructed for them. Women might not call their classmates or professor prejudiced but they might feel that the environment is not a good, fair, or comfortable place for them and, as a consequence, suppress their feminine identity or leave the field (Cheryan et al., 2009; Margolis & Fisher, 2002). In our view, places that allow some people but not others to be true to all parts of themselves are prejudiced (see also Walton, Paunesku, & Dweck, 2011).

A third type of prejudiced context is created when the local context interacts with a person’s prejudiced attitude to create disparate outcomes or experiences for some social groups, relative to others. For example, in the context of judging criminals, certain attitudes and associations can produce disparate effects that change outcomes for racial minority group members. Implicit associations between African Americans and apes, once thought to be a relic of the past, continue to persist in American society with grave consequences in criminal justice settings. In an archival study of news articles, researchers found that articles about Blacks convicted of capital crimes were more likely to contain ape-relevant language than

articles about Whites convicted of the same crimes. Moreover, individuals portrayed as more apelike were more likely to be executed than those who were not (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008). The researchers argue that a cultural association between “Black” and “ape” finds voice in popular representations of criminals—like metaphors, cartoons, visual imagery, and other popular media—and continues to affect life and death outcomes, reinforcing group-based inequities in convictions and death penalty rates (Goff et al., 2008). A less fatal, but nonetheless consequential example occurs in the context of promotions. Research shows that through cultural and historical representations, a link exists between the concept of “man” and the concept of “leader” in the United States (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This link makes it more likely that men will be perceived as having the characteristics of a leader relative to women. Within the context of promotions, when management looks to identify leaders to promote, this link causes men to be identified and promoted at rates higher than equally qualified women (Eagly & Carli, 2007; see also Biernat, Collins, Katzarska-Miller, Thompson, 2009 and Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005).

Other prejudiced situations are those that employ practices, policies, or decision-making procedures that seem neutral from an observer’s perspective but in practice disadvantage some social groups relative to others (Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003). Consider a historical example regarding college admissions decisions within the University of California system (Crosby et al., 2003). For decades, admission decisions were based on a “points” system with extra points awarded to students for good grades in advanced placement courses. From an

observer's perspective, this practice seemed to fairly reward students who performed well on advanced college preparatory material. However, Chancellor Tien of the University of California, Berkeley abolished this practice when he realized that it systematically disadvantaged students from underfunded high schools that had few advanced placement courses.

Termed "selective system bias," prejudiced situations like these occur when the between-group difference on the "gating mechanism" used to identify candidates is larger than the between-group difference on the criterion (Jencks, 1998; Crosby, 2004). For example, selective system bias can exist for standardized tests, like the SAT, used in college admissions and scholarship decisions. If racial group differences on the SAT are larger than the between-group differences on the criterion (e.g., students' actual grades in college)—presumably because the lower performing group has other areas of relative strength unmeasured by the SAT—then, basing admission decisions on the SAT will effectively discriminate against the lower performing group. Again, this situational factor can cause prejudiced outcomes without prejudiced people or prejudicial attitudes.

Another factor that creates prejudiced situations involves the weighing of criteria in selection decisions in ways that may—intentionally or not—discriminate against individuals from certain social groups. Linda Wightman's (1998) discussion of law school admissions provides a clear example. Traditionally, law was considered the domain of men. Today, women still remain significantly underrepresented in law, making up approximately 31.5% of all lawyers (Bureau of

Labor Statistics, 2011). Why might this be? Do prejudiced admission officers actively discriminate against women? Is this a problem of people or situations?

Admission decisions by most accredited American law schools are based primarily on two factors: applicants' LSAT scores—usually weighted at about 60%, and their undergraduate grade point averages—weighted at about 40% (Wightman, 1998; Crosby et al., 2003). These weights are applied equally to all students who seek admission—a neutral procedure on its face. The problem emerges when one considers an effect of the weights. Women, on average, do significantly worse on the LSATs than men, but they have better undergraduate grades. By overweighting LSAT scores relative to grades, law schools disadvantage women (Crosby et al., 2003). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that the use of the LSAT may not be justified if the aim of law schools is to produce effective lawyers at graduation. Indeed, a large-scale study of the predictors of successful lawyering found that LSAT scores are “not particularly useful” in predicting lawyer effectiveness as defined through individual interviews, focus groups and surveys of practicing lawyers, law faculty, law students, judges, and legal clients throughout the United States (Shultz & Zedeck, 2008; 2011). Like the example of the women's restroom in the basement of the Math department, majority group members might not even register a problem with long-standing practices like this. Like the predominant view within psychology, their construal may not include an understanding that prejudice could stem from situations or procedures. As long as the people making the admission decisions are unbiased, they assume that the outcomes will be unbiased.

Another procedure that creates prejudice is when people continue to accept measures of merit at face value when those measures are systematically biased against certain social groups (Walton, Spencer, & Erman, in press). Research finds that stereotype threat causes grades and standardized test scores assessed in common academic environments to underestimate the ability and academic potential of women and minorities (Walton & Spencer, 2009). Accepting these scores at face value—by, for example, treating a 1200 SAT score from a White student and a Black student as reflecting the same level of ability and potential—would discriminate against the Black student because the Black student earned that score in the face of stereotype threat. Thus, on average, a Black student's SAT score reflects a higher level of ability and potential than the same score from a White student. Not taking this situational variable into account in making admissions decisions will result in discrimination against racial and ethnic minority students and women (Walton et al., in press), and do so even when individual decision-makers are nonprejudiced.

### **How Do Environments Become Prejudiced?**

There are several ways environments can become prejudiced. Often, they do not involve prejudiced people at the helm. As we have seen from the examples above, a common way environments can become prejudiced is when they do not adequately take into account differences in the way that majority- and minority-group individuals construe them or how those construals can lead to disparate experiences and outcomes. Because their group membership is linked to longstanding historical and cultural contexts of stereotyping and prejudice, minority

group members bring with them concerns about being the target of stereotyping and prejudice. These concerns engender a sense of vigilance and tune their attention to cues that are less important to majority group members. These cues include things like test diagnosticity, demographic queries, subtle cues to nonbelonging, numerical underrepresentation, colorblind diversity ideologies and fixed representations of intelligence. When majority and minority group members work in environments that contain such cues—even though it is the same objective environment—the cues cause threat and underperformance for minority group members but boost performance and psychological wellbeing for majority group members (Murphy & Taylor, 2011; Walton & Cohen, 2003).

Majority group members come from a different cultural and historical perspective that engenders vigilance to a different set of situational cues—often related to changes in the status quo. As the United States undergoes demographic change, groups that have been historically advantaged are tuned to cues that suggest population shifts, changes in attitudes regarding intergroup relations, uncertainties in group status and hierarchy, and economic decline. Research shows that, when demographic changes are salient, racial tensions are likely to emerge as people characterize resources in a zero-sum fashion (Norton & Sommers, 2011). As environments become laden with cues regarding the status quo, prejudice and intergroup tension is likely to emerge in those environments.

Another way that environments can become places of prejudice is when local norms suggest that prejudice against particular groups is acceptable (Crandall et al., 2002). When it is common to use group-based stereotypes as heuristics in making

judgments and decisions about individuals—even when judging their strengths or aptitudes—it sets the stage for prejudice and discrimination. For example when women in a workplace are assigned care-giving roles like coordinating birthday celebrations or an African American employee is asked to DJ the office holiday party, it doesn't necessarily mean that individuals in the workplace are prejudiced. But it does send a signal that group-based stereotypes are acceptable heuristics to use during social interaction in that setting. Within such environments, it would be unsurprising if the use of stereotypes generalized over time to more consequential interactions such as using stereotypical guides to identify who to promote or commend as a leader in the workplace (Biernat, Fuegen, & Kobrynowicz, 2010; Biernat & Vescio, 2002; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005).

Behavioral models of prejudice are also powerful in shaping environments (Donnerstein & Donnerstein, 1978; Glaser & Gilens, 1997). One study showed that when an audience laughed at racist jokes about people from the Middle East compared to when they remained silent, a more negative implicit norm toward people from the Middle East was formed, which in turn, led observers to discriminate against the targeted group (Yoshida, Peach, Zanna, & Spencer, 2012). Indeed, groups or individuals can create environments of prejudice through modeling. In fact, research shows that a single individual who expresses benign acceptance of racist acts can affect not only public acceptance but also private acceptance by observers—creating a self-perpetuating cycle of prejudiced norms (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994). While a norms-based approach



posits that prejudiced situations like these encourage the expression of individuals' prejudiced attitudes which in turn strengthens those attitudes, the social-contextual model of prejudice extends that prediction by suggesting that prejudiced norms and behavioral models may compel people to behave in prejudiced ways without, in any traditional sense, becoming more prejudiced themselves. Similar to more automatic processes, observing a prejudiced situational norm or behavioral model might automatically activate a prime to behavior link, causing individuals to behave in prejudiced ways.

### **How Do Environments Become Unprejudiced?**

How might we create egalitarian environments in which social groups are not systematically disadvantaged in their psychological experiences or outcomes? Extant research has shown that people do best in identity-safe settings—settings where people feel that all aspects of their social identities are valued and respected by others and where they are confident that they will be treated as individuals, rather than as token group members (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005; Steele et al., 2002). Within these environments, vigilance processes are relaxed and people feel they will not be perceived, treated or evaluated based on their group membership (Davies et al., 2005; Murphy et al., 2007).

One way to create identity-safe environments is to introduce situational cues that account for majority and minority differences in construal and allay people's identity-based concerns. For example, stigmatized group members are concerned about being seen to belong or "fit" within valued environments such as schools and workplaces. Several studies reveal that messages that target the belonging concerns

of minority group members can buffer the negative psychological experiences and underperformance associated with them, without affecting the outcomes of majority group members who don't grapple with the same concerns (Walton & Cohen, 2007; 2011a; see also Walton & Carr, 2012). Another situational intervention could be undertaken regarding demographic queries that typically precede national standardized tests like the SAT and GRE. Research shows that asking students to indicate their racial, ethnic or gender group membership prior to taking these exams causes women and students of color to significantly underperform on them, but have no effect for men and White individuals (Danaher & Crandall, 2008). Placing demographic queries after the tests should reduce concerns among those disadvantaged by group-based intellectual stereotypes without affecting majority group members.

Similarly, research shows that both minority and majority group members are concerned that their identities may be liabilities in their pursuit of success within social or professional environments—but for different reasons. While stigmatized groups might be concerned about discrimination, majority group members might be concerned that their majority group membership might place them at a disadvantage when settings aim to “diversify” (Norton & Sommers, 2011). Environments can allay these identity-based concerns by including situational cues that clearly delineate how an individual's success within a setting will be evaluated and how rewards will be distributed (Laurin, Fitzsimmons, & Kay, 2011). These types of situational cues may reduce people's concerns that their social group membership will be a factor that limits or blocks their attainment of important goals

within an environment because the criteria for evaluation and promotion is publicly and clearly specified.

Members of majority and minority groups want to be treated with dignity and respect as individuals, but they also want to feel that their group, in a general sense, is viewed with respect. Research reveals that environments differ in the extent to which they cultivate norms of group-based respect. Group-based respect is an indicator of the extent to which an institution acknowledges, accepts, and values each subgroup that makes up the whole (Huo & Molina, 2006). Particularly in racially diverse settings, when minorities feel that their group membership is respected and valued by an institution or environment, they show more positive evaluations of outgroup members as well as greater engagement and motivation (Derks, van Laar, & Ellemers, 2007; Huo, Molina, Binning, & Funge, 2010). In addition to fostering group-based respect, studies have shown that a fostering a cultural value of empathy and compassion is important to reducing prejudice within settings. When an environment explicitly values tolerance, acceptance, and empathy, it may cause people to reconsider the appropriateness of prejudice and discrimination in an environment (Aronson, 2000; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Wilson et al., 2000).

Another way environments can be structured to reduce prejudice is to create opportunities for groups to work together towards common goals. The jigsaw classroom (Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979) is one example of an environment structured around cooperation and collaboration that reduces prejudice and facilitates learning. When all members of an environment are responsible for

mastering an aspect of the whole and communicating it to others, each individual—regardless of their group membership—is essential for full understanding. Each person garners respect in the role of expert and each is needed to achieve a maximally positive solution. Relying on and respecting the contribution of each individual, cooperative environments reduce the likelihood that peers will reduce each other to group-based stereotypes. Similarly, the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) suggests that when environments foster superordinate identities that are inclusive and that create connections across subgroups, the meaning and function of these narrower subgroup memberships such as race, gender and ethnicity become less important in intergroup interactions (Gaertner, Dovidio, Nier, Ward, & Banker, 1999; Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989). Broadening people’s conceptions about who belongs to their ingroup fosters more positive, respectful attitudes and behaviors toward individuals formerly perceived as outgroup members. Such common ingroup identities have been shown to provide a foundation for the development of intergroup friendships (West, Pearson, Dovidio, Shelton, & Trail, 2009).

Finally, powerful members often have the cultural capital to shift local norms and create nonprejudiced environments. Within companies, for example, senior management who model appropriate behavior and clearly state expectations of respect and equal treatment influence the way their subordinates interact (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). Using case studies and research findings, organizations could educate workers about how policies, procedures, and practices that seem neutral on their face may limit the outcomes or experiences of some social groups.

In this way, it may be possible to broaden people's construal of what it means to be prejudiced from a problem of people to a problem of people and environments. By broadening people's construal about how settings produce bias, organizations may be able to leverage the good will of people who truly wish to be egalitarian, encouraging them to actively work towards creating and maintaining nonprejudiced environments. Finally, because vigilance to, and processing of bias may have egocentric or ethnocentric components to it (Clayton & Crosby, 1986; Rutte et al., 1994), encouraging individuals to anonymously and confidentially report their perceptions of biased outcomes and experiences on a regular basis will help environments identify problematic policies or procedures and allocate attention where it is needed. Research shows that when outcomes or experiences are found to differ by social group membership, managers should take prompt action to address these disparities in order to maintain a culture of equality and respect (Pearson et al., 2000; Pearson & Porath, 2004).

## **Conclusion**

While social psychology has a long history of emphasizing the role of the situation in affecting behavior and important outcomes, in the context of stereotyping and prejudice the dominant research emphasis has been on the assessment of individual-differences in prejudice, whether explicit or implicit. This approach has yielded a rich understanding of how attitudinal processes contribute to discrimination. In this chapter, we call for a broader consideration of the role of the context in the study of prejudice. We describe research that demonstrates that much is known about aspects of environments that are likely to produce prejudice

and discrimination. We hope that more focused attention to environments, and their role in perpetuating and remedying prejudice, will produce novel interventions and solutions to further pursue the ideal of equal opportunity. One lesson of the history of civil rights was that changing laws can change minds by changing behavior first (Pettigrew, 1966). So we hope that identifying and restructuring prejudiced environments will lead to greater equality between groups.

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