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Kristin J. Anderson
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INTRODUCTION

The changing place of prejudice: a migration underground

The secret life of subtle prejudice

You used to be able to spot them a mile away. Bigots. If they weren't wearing white hoods, you could count on their willingness to identify themselves in conversation by their unabashed use of racial epithets and sexist stereotypes. They were the co-workers telling homophobic jokes in the break room. They were the people who insisted that a woman could never be president because her pre-menstrual syndrome might one day lead to nuclear war. Bigots – loud and proud and easy to recognize from their behavior and conversation. The bigot was able to find justification and comfort in a deeply rooted set of ideas supported by prejudice at cultural and institutional levels.

Regardless of the precise stereotypes, people of color, women, poor people, and sexual minorities have historically been represented as genetically inferior. Since the 1950s, academics, activists, and policy-makers have made serious efforts to focus on social and political conditions, and to challenge the very concept of a biological basis of "race."[1] The sixties and seventies saw massive social movements advocating civil rights, feminism, and gay liberation. There have been distinctive shifts that indicate a greater willingness to understand the shaping

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role of environmental factors, to explore differences without always assuming deficits, and at least to *pretend* to value egalitarianism and equal opportunity. As biological and social sciences have challenged claims regarding the biological basis of human differentiation, legislative (e.g. *Brown vs. Board of Education*) and cultural transformations have made overt racism, sexism, and homophobia less socially acceptable. Many individuals now acknowledge that prejudice has had devastating consequences, but they also believe that prejudice is largely a thing of the past.

That overt and conspicuous bigotry has decreased is supported by research. In the United Kingdom, in 1987, 75% of people polled expressed the view that homosexuality was always or mostly wrong. By 2008, only 32% expressed this view.[2] In 1989, a third of British men agreed with the statement, "*A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family*." By 2008, agreement with that statement had dropped to 17%.[3] In the early 1960s, only one third of white Americans believed that blacks and whites should be allowed by law to marry one other. By 1995, four of every five whites believed they should be.[4] Are such changes in reported attitudes reflecting heartfelt beliefs or is this surface reporting? Susan Fiske[5] observes that the more public the arena, and the more abstract the principle, the more marked the change in attitudes toward tolerance. For instance, in the United States, 68% of respondents endorsed racial segregation in schools in the 1940s and only 4% endorsed it by 1995. This sounds like tremendous progress. But while most white Americans now report being willing to live next door to a black family, 70% report that they would move away if blacks came into their neighborhood in "great numbers." Whites appear, then, to be more supportive of equal rights in principle than of equal rights in practice. When commitment is required to perform specific actions involving their own lives and the status of their own group, they are much less receptive to the idea of equality. For example, only about 15% of whites

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believe that the government should help African Americans improve their living standards because of past discrimination. Among Britons, a substantial number of people think that equal opportunity measures for blacks and Asians have "gone too far."[6]

On the one hand, overt bigotry appears to have decreased, but on the other hand, people are not necessarily willing to give up their own privileged status. Dominant groups appear increasingly tolerant, but when it comes to sacrificing some of their own comfort or endorsing government assistance for subordinate groups, they are disinclined to favor these remedies. In terms of racial and ethnic attitudes, it appears, then, that whites' attitudes toward ethnic minorities in the early part of the twenty-first century are ambivalent and consist of both positive and negative elements. There is a consensus among social scientists that prejudice has changed in the last several decades. The number of individuals *reporting* prejudiced attitudes has decreased. At the same time, the *location* of prejudice has changed; it now resides underground, in a subtler form. This change of location in social space can manifest in a discrepancy between what people report and how they behave. Angela Davis[7] talks about the *migration* of racism. "It moves, it travels, it migrates, and it transmutes itself."[8] Her analysis of the ability of racism to change its form and location can apply to other forms of prejudice as well. It is this changing place of prejudice that is examined in this book.

Benign bigotry: an introduction to the harm of subtle prejudice

Given the changing nature of prejudice and its often covert and unconscious forms, how do we go about studying it? How do we make subtle prejudice visible, and how do we reveal its effects? This book examines various manifestations of subtle prejudice. This analysis harnesses the power of social psychological theory and research to explain common, everyday manifestations of subtle

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prejudice and deconstructs the myths created to maintain these attitudes. I will use *benign bigotry* as an umbrella term to describe subtle prejudice – prejudices that are automatic, covert, often unconscious, unintentional, and sometimes undetectable by the target. The term is not intended to suggest that the subtle forms of bigotry described in this book are less harmful than other forms. They are not. In fact, benign bigotry is extremely harmful because it is insidious. With an understanding of benign bigotry comes the recognition that behaviors and attitudes may appear harmless and even positive, when they represent only a shift in the salience, not the strength, of prejudice. In the remaining pages of this introduction, I discuss some of the technical and analytical ways by which social psychologists examine subtle forms of prejudice. Some of this research focuses on one particular kind of bigotry and some applies to various myths and faulty assumptions. The introduction ends with a discussion about the scope of this book.

Because of the changing place of prejudice, social psychologists now distinguish between explicit and implicit prejudice.[9] Explicit prejudice is a set of feelings about others that are consciously accessible, seemingly controllable, and self-reported. Racism based on explicit prejudice is referred to as *old-fashioned* or *overt* racism. Implicit prejudice may or may not be consciously accessible, and may be difficult or impossible to control. Implicit prejudice is believed to be a consequence of years of exposure to associations in the environment, it tends to be impervious to conscious control, and it is relatively stable. Racism based on implicit prejudice has various names: *subtle*, *covert*, *modern*, *ambivalent*, or *aversive*. Because prejudice has changed, we can no longer detect its presence simply by interviewing people and asking whether or not they dislike certain groups. Most people would not admit to being prejudiced nowadays and many of them truly believe they are not prejudiced. This subtle form of prejudice is often studied by capturing the difference between overt self-reports of attitudes and results

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obtained using more covert measures in which research participants are unaware that their prejudice is being studied.

Scholars in any of the social sciences may study prejudice and bigotry but it is my contention that social psychologists are well positioned to study subtle forms of prejudice because they, more than those in other disciplines, rely on the experimental method. The experimental method allows the researcher to recreate real-life settings through controlled situations in which measures of prejudice can be taken without the research participant realizing that prejudice is being examined. For instance, a personnel manager might be asked to evaluate resumes of job candidates. The manager is asked to carefully review the applications and to decide whether or not each candidate should be hired. Unbeknownst to the manager, the resumes have been manipulated so that some of the resumes have women's names at the top, while others have men's. The candidates' qualifications are equivalent in the two sets. How qualified is each applicant? Research finds that the answer to that question depends on whether the evaluator believes the applicant to be a woman or a man. Do evaluators have any idea sexism is being measured? Probably not. Do they believe they are discriminatory? Probably not.

Another way to study subtle prejudice using the experimental method is to set up a situation in which respondents can be given the option of responding without appearing that they are actually biased. John Dovidio and Samuel Gaertner's[10] research compares people's tendency to express old-fashioned (overt) racism and what they describe as *aversive* (subtle, ambivalent) racism. They surveyed two sets of white students from the US: one group in 1989 and the second in 1999. In the first phase of the study, they asked students about their racial attitudes (the overt measure). Students responded to statements such as: "*Blacks shouldn't push themselves where they are not wanted*," and "*I would probably feel somewhat self-conscious dancing with a black person in a public place*." Later, in the second phase of

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the experiment, students were asked to select applicants for a peer counseling program, using interview excerpts as the basis for their choices. The information was manipulated such that the job candidate was either African American or white, and had one of three types of qualifications: clearly strong, ambiguous, or clearly weak. Students were asked whether or not they would recommend each job candidate, and how strongly. Note that, from the student raters' point of view, there was nothing about this procedure that would suggest the students' prejudice was being measured, except at the earlier and seemingly disconnected phase of the experiment. Dovidio and Gaertner hypothesized that, due to the continued emphasis in the US on egalitarian values, the general trend toward the expression of less prejudiced attitudes would be reflected from the earlier sample to the later one. They predicted that over the ten-year testing period, students' overt attitudes about African Americans would become more tolerant. They also speculated that bias in favor of whites and against African Americans would still appear in the subtler measure of assessing job candidate qualifications. Their hypotheses were borne out in their results. Students surveyed in 1999 had lower overt prejudice scores than did those surveyed in 1989. In terms of the students' ratings of job candidates, an interesting pattern emerged that is consistent with the notion of subtle prejudice. There were no differences in the recommendations for black and white candidates who had strong and weak qualifications – clearly qualified black and white students were recommended for hire, while clearly unqualified black and white candidates were not. However, black candidates with ambiguous qualifications were recommended less often than were whites with ambiguous qualifications. When a white job candidate's qualifications were ambiguous, students rated the candidates as if their qualifications were strong, whereas when a black candidate's qualifications were ambiguous, they rated the candidates as if they were weak. Thus whites seem to have been given the benefit of the doubt by other

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whites, a benefit not extended to African Americans. Dovidio and Gaertner write:

> Because [subtle] racists consciously recognize and endorse egalitarian values, they will not discriminate in situations in which they recognize that discrimination would be obvious to others and themselves . . . However, because aversive racists do possess negative feelings, often unconsciously, discrimination occurs when bias is not obvious or can be rationalized on the basis of some factor other than race. (p. 315)

So, although the students in the 1999 study reported less overt prejudice, they manifested subtle prejudice through the differential treatment of black and white candidates who had ambiguous qualifications. The fact that the discrimination against black candidates and favoritism of white candidates only took place when the applicants had ambiguous qualifications is significant because, in real life, many people's qualifications are not clearly outstanding or clearly deficient. Most individuals fall in the middle. Comedian Chris Rock agrees that most Americans are average, and points out that "average" has different consequences depending on one's race:

> Now when you go to a class there are 30 kids in the class: 5 smart, 5 dumb and the rest they're in the middle. And that's just all America is: a nation in the middle, a nation of B and C students . . . [A] black C student can't even be the manager at Burger King. Meanwhile the white C student just happens to be the President of the United States of America![11]

Chris Rock is referring to the widely known fact that the President of the United States at the time, George W. Bush, was a marginally good student. This observation is borne out in Dovidio and Gaertner's findings – subtle prejudice often operates in ambiguous conditions in which there is a lot of room for idiosyncratic interpretation. When a white person's qualifications are ambiguous, people tend to elevate that person, whereas when a black person's

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qualifications are ambiguous, people tend to devalue that person. Many of the examples in this book deal with applications for employment because the consequences of benign bigotry affect people's livelihood and their ability to work and earn income.

Subtle prejudice can also be measured using physiological measures – comparing what participants *say* (an explicit measure) with physiological measures (e.g. changes in heart rate, sweating) indicative of how they *feel* (implicit measures). The implicit measure that has received the most attention since the mid 1990s is the Implicit Association Test (IAT). The IAT measures the strength of association between mental constructs.[12] This computer-based task is essentially a sorting task during which the participant combines people, objects, or symbols with evaluative statements. For instance, a typical IAT on race would have the participant sort white faces and black faces and sort "Good" (e.g. paradise) and "Bad" (e.g. abuse) words at a fast pace. The ease (speed) with which one can sort black faces using the same response (a key press) as for "Good" or for "Bad" words is compared to the ease with which one can sort white faces sharing the same response as "Good" or "Bad" words. This speed reflects the strength of associative links between blacks and goodness/badness and between whites and goodness/badness. Whites tend to sort faces more quickly if white faces are aligned with "good" words and black faces aligned with "bad."[13] This means that whites react more quickly when the prompt matches the dominant stereotype and react more slowly if the association challenges the stereotype. Studies tend to find a discrepancy between results on the IAT, an implicit measure of attitudes, and responses from self-report surveys, which capture explicit measures of attitudes. This discrepancy suggests that the implicit responses from the IAT reveal one's unguarded, actual attitudes whereas responses from explicit measures reflect one's attitudes filtered through impression management.

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Sources of subtle prejudice

Where does subtle prejudice come from? It comes from an internal conflict in people who want to comply with their non-prejudiced ideals, but who are still affected by the stereotypes about groups in the culture that surrounds them. Prejudiced values and ideas originate from many sources and influences. Prejudiced attitudes can come from the media, from growing up in a prejudiced familial environment, and from not having much contact with people different from oneself. Because of norms against prejudice and anti-discrimination legislation (in many cases it is illegal to discriminate), many people's prejudices take on hidden and sometimes unconscious forms. Subtle racism, for instance, is different in significant ways from *old-fashioned racism*. Old-fashioned racism might produce beliefs articulated as: "*Blacks are lazy*," or "*Blacks are stupid*." Differently phrased, but no less pernicious, subtle racism produces statements that disguise prejudice, sometimes even from the speaker. "*I don't have anything against blacks*," one might say, "*but this particular applicant is not a good fit for our company*."

Features of subtle prejudice

What are the features of subtle prejudice? First, subtle prejudice tends to be automatic, covert, unconscious, ambiguous, ambivalent and often unintentional. As will be demonstrated throughout this book, prejudice isn't merely antipathy toward a given group. The content of many prejudices consists of both negative and positive attributes. Unfortunately, "positive" attributes often function to perpetuate a target group's subordination in that the target is perceived as incompetent or in need of protection. It is the ambivalent feelings and subtle behaviors that explain, for instance, how it happens that one member of a minority group is discriminated against in a workplace while another is not. Subtle prejudice

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also tends to manifest in ambiguous conditions, as was demonstrated in the evaluation of applicants with mixed qualifications in the Dovidio and Gaertner study described above.

Second, unlike the extreme and overt prejudice of hate group members, subtle prejudice is not assumed to be the result of individual psychopathology but rather of the collision of two processes: normal cognitive processes, such as shortcuts in thinking and hasty generalizations, and the influence of sociocultural and historical processes, such as laws and policies that relegate certain groups to low status (e.g. laws prohibiting same-sex marriage). This is not to imply that prejudice is normal or that those who are prejudiced cannot help themselves and are therefore excused from self-examination. It does mean that categorizing and generalizing are part of our cognitive make-up – we all make generalizations that simplify our social worlds. However, *what* we generalize, *who* we categorize, and the content of our stereotypes can be modified and changed, and certainly should be modified and changed in the case of prejudice and discrimination.

Third, most people go out of their way to appear non-prejudiced – to themselves and to others; in many cases they truly believe they are not prejudiced. These three features make subtle prejudice insidious because they cause it to be widespread, normalized, resistant to change, and difficult for both the perpetrators and the targets to detect. The work on subtle bias suggests that, while we still find evidence of overt prejudice in people, these more contemporary forms of prejudice may account for the persistence of disparities in society.

Schemas and prejudice

It is clear that all of us categorize people, objects, and events. All of us, regardless of where we live or how much money we earn, create *schemas*, mental frameworks of beliefs, feelings, and assumptions

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