

CHAPTER I



INTRODUCTION

How an individual perceives the world depends upon two important factors -- the nature of his abilities and his social environment. Of course, these two factors are related and interact with each other. The person becomes aware of his abilities (physical and psychological) by comparing himself to others. By doing this he learns to distinguish himself from other people and from objects. By developing language, he is able to communicate and understand not only what makes him feel as he does, but also what makes others feel as they do. By having such relationships, sooner or later he will realise that there are also differences between his wishes and wants and the wishes and wants of others. Year by year, this kind of knowledge is continuously accumulated and becomes the data which we call his past experiences.

On the basis of past experiences, the individual develops his conception of who and what he is in relation to others. We call this his "self concept". This concept of self is established over a long period of time and it is the individual's identification of himself. He makes a great effort to maintain it. The individual strives to be himself (as he sees himself), to live in accordance with his concept and attitudes regarding himself, whether these be true or false as seen by others. As a result, the individual will accept and incorporate that which agrees

with his "self concept" as already established and he will seek to reject or avoid experiences, or the meaning of experiences, which are not congruent with it in order to maintain his self concept. Thus, how one perceives, interpretes, accepts, resists or rejects the information concerning oneself will be determined to a great extent by his "self concept". We may call this "self concept" the cognitive categories that individuals use to judge themselves.

The categories developed to judge others are very often the same as those with which we judge ourselves. The information upon which judgments are based is the same, that is, our past experiences. We often judge others by the similarity or dissimilarity to our own self-image. If an individual performs certain actions with which we agree, and which we also perform or would like to perform, we will judge him favourably. It may be that with more experience, an individual's perceptions of others is based on more "objective" standards, but this is usually only to the extent to which an individual has integrated these standards and either follows them or would like to follow them.

Let us take two examples. An individual dislikes the killing of human beings and he judges himself to be a very peaceful person who has faith in human beings and a great love for human life. Assuming that this is not a distorted self concept, the individual will then judge other people who have killed or who are concerned with killing others in a very negative light.

A second example would be a friendship. We become very close friends with another person and suddenly we find out that he likes a certain person whom we dislike. What happens? We feel disturbed and attempt to convince the friend that he has made a mistake. Usually, if the object of our like or dislike is important, either we will change or our friend will change. Why is this so? This happens because we feel that our friend is similar to ourselves. That is, we judge our friend by the same categories with which we judge ourselves and we are disturbed when he differs from us. (12)

Therefore, when we judge other people, we do so on the basis of categories which we have developed over the years. The categories enable us to identify a new person and to know what to expect from him. Sometimes the categories may be composed of a blend of knowledge as well as false ideals and emotional tone. When the new information conflicts with the existing categories, it may be distorted through selective accentuation or interpretations so as to make the evidence seem to conform to the previous categories.

These categories are the means by which we form impressions of others. In this sense, we can say that each of us has his own selective organization which forms impressions of another's personality. These will influence the course of interpersonal relationships.

We would expect then, that when an individual enters a new situation and meets a stranger, he will use his set of categories to judge the new person. As was stated along, we use our categories to judge ourselves and the world around us. Since each person has had different past experiences and relates to others differently, he should also form first impressions differently.

Also, first impressions are based on very little information. We would expect then, that when more and more information is presented to an individual, there will be changes in the original impression. We would also expect that individuals with different past experiences (a different set of categories) would change differently. It may also be expected that certain individuals might not change their first impression at all, even though more information is presented.

In Laschin's (11) study on primary-recency in impression information of person, he reports that when a person is presented with a piece of information for the first time and another new piece of information later, the first piece of information will influence the individual more in determining the impressions of an object or person than the second. This shows that the individual is the "passive victim" of primacy in the formation of impressions of others and that first impressions tend to resist change.

Also, a study done by Haire and Grunes (10) on college students' perceptions of factory workers shows that when a piece of information is presented which is inconsistent with the individual's image of factory workers, he will manage to overcome this inconsistency in order to preserve his original impression of factory workers. Some deny the quality, some modify, some deny that they are factory workers, and some recognize the incongruity but maintain the original perception.

Another study done by Gollin (8) shows a similar result. When a new piece of information is presented which contradicts the individual's impression, he found that some people unify the impression, and attempt to integrate the contradictory elements, some simplify the impression

and retain only the first one and some retain both qualities without attempting to unify them. This shows that an individual has difficulty in achieving an organized impression that integrates the two sets of contradictory information.

These studies show how impressions are formed and how individuals react differently to the presentation of new information.

The question this research raises is: do people with different personalities change their perceptions differently? As stated before, the reasons for such differences should be in the differences between the past experiences (categories) of the individuals concerned. Also, the reasons should be in the abilities of individuals to permit changes in their categories (impressions) as new information is presented.

Freud-Brunswick (7) is dealing with such an ability. She refers to an individual's ^{an individual's ability to handle ambiguity} intolerance of ambiguity, stating that an individual who is intolerant of ambiguity is a person who is unable to cope with ambiguity or unclear objects or events.

"A person who is high in intolerance of ambiguity will tend to engage in black and white thinking to form simple, clearly organized cognitive system"
(6, p.67)

According to this study, different individuals consistently differ in their capacity to tolerate or cope with ambiguous objects and unstructured events. So we would expect that when an individual who is relatively intolerant of ambiguity is faced with new information which is contrary to his original impression, he will attempt to distort or resist this information so that it will agree with his original set more than will an individual who is relatively tolerant of ambiguity.

One of the most common forms of perceptual distortion occurs in individuals who hold negative images of a group of people -- what is often called a stereotype.* We usually associate a stereotype as being a set of categories maintained by individuals who are prejudiced against a group of people. A question to be raised is how these negative sets of categories (images) develop?

One way in which negative stereotypes can develop is as a result of inner conflict in the personality of an individual. This individual will use an ethnic group or another group as a scapegoat on which he projects his frustrated feelings. Psychodynamically, this is similar to what Frankl-Brunsvik has called intolerance of ambiguity.

A study done by Bettelheim and Janowitz (3) on prejudice stated that ethnic intolerance is a function of anxiety, frustration and deprivations, where the intolerant person's accusations are ways to justify his aggression. In the other cases, the stereotype develops as a result of acceptable standards of social behavior. A negative image is held by a great number of people of a group and is considered one of the standards of behavior of that group. In both these cases, individuals will distort information about or experience with members of the group against which he holds a negative image so that the characteristics of the individual fit the image. In other words, a person's impression of an individual who is a member of another group will be negative on the basis of a set of categories developed either from personality conflicts or group standards.

* can be both positive and negative.

Pettigrew (13) recently reported an investigation of the personality and socio-cultural factors which lead to prejudice in the Union of South Africa and the southern United States. He stated that the white people in the Union of South Africa "are unusually prejudiced against Africans."

Continuing he states:

"This raises the intriguing question as to whether this increased hostility represents:

- (a) more externalizing personality potential for prejudice among South Africans,
- (b) the effects of different cultural norms and pressures, or
- (c) both of these." (13, p.31)

In investigating these questions, Pettigrew used the following different measures:

1. For "the personality potential for prejudice", he used the F scale which is a test for measuring authoritarianism (what has been called the prejudiced personality). This test is said to measure a general personality type which is characterized by prejudice towards minority groups in general as well as an intolerance of ambiguity.

2. For the effects of different "cultural norms", the author used a special test of social conformity developed for the research.

3. For the attitudes towards Africans, he used a special attitude questionnaire developed for the research.

His general conclusions are:

"Externalization factors such as authoritarianism are associated with prejudice in both the South African and southern United States samples at levels highly comparable with other areas. Data from South African students hint, however, that susceptibility to conform may be an unusually important psychological component of prejudice in regions where the cultural norms positively sanction intolerance. In addition, there is no

indication in either of these samples that there is any more externalizing personality potential for prejudice in these areas than in more tolerant parts of the globe.

The extensive racial prejudice of the South African and southern groups seems directly linked with the anti-black dictates of the two cultures. Sociocultural factors which reflect the mores consistently relate to prejudice -- place of birth, political party preference, upward mobility, and ethnic group membership in the South African data, and sex, church attendance, social mobility, political party identification, armed service, and education in the southern data. The pattern is clear: conformity to South African or southern mores is associated with racial tolerance." (13, p.40)

Taken together with other published work, these limited results suggest a broad, cross-national hypothesis:

"In areas with historically imbedded traditions of racial intolerance, externalizing personality factors underlying prejudice remain important, but sociocultural factors are unusually crucial and account for the heightened racial hostility." (13, p.40)

Interpreting these conclusions, we can state that an individual's perception of another in a discriminatory manner is not only related to personality factors, but is also directly related to the standards of the group (or culture) to which he belongs. We would also say that if an individual develops his image of another group mainly as a result of his acceptance of group standards, he would not necessarily maintain a similar negative image towards another group. On the other hand, a person who develops his negative image towards a group as a result of personality conflict would hold similar attitudes towards many other groups.

The Chinese in Thailand have been reported (14) to be discriminated against, especially in the last two or three decades. Some of the 'reasons' given for this discrimination are that the Chinese control the economy of the country and are taking the money from the Thai. Coughlin states that some Thai people have attributed a whole host of negative characteristics to the Chinese which are said to be a result of Chinese up-bringing.

"The Chinese are uncouth because they are often loud and raucous in public, (and) because they are noisy eaters...They are dirty people who don't bath often, who neglect their personal appearance and befoul the areas in which they reside...the Chinese are grasping, excessively materialistic, (and) interested only in making money." (5, P. 85)

He also states that in spite of prejudices and latent discontents against each other, face-to-face relationships between the Thai and the Chinese are outwardly good. They mingle easily and freely in all public aspects of life. (5,P.96)

Whatever the causes of the prejudice against the Chinese, those categories which are used to judge the Chinese maintain the prejudice and discrimination. The question of maintaining the image (categories) of the Chinese as negative must be traced back to the nature of it's development. Following Pettigrew's analysis, we would look for two possible psychological reasons: 1) the individual acceptance of the standard of a group which is prejudicial towards Chinese, or (2) an individual's internal psychological conflict which leads him or her to discriminate against a minority group in order to relieve some of the internal conflict (what Pettigrew has called externalization factors or what others have referred to as ego-defenses).

Following Pettigrew's analysis of prejudice, this author feels that the major causes of the negative image of the Chinese in Thailand is a result of the standards of certain aspects of Thai society and the general tendency of people to accept the standards of the group to which they belong. It is probable that individuals who have a greater tendency to conform would hold the standards of their peer groups more strongly than those who tend not to conform. Hence, individuals who are members of peer groups which have a negative image of the Chinese will themselves be negative towards the Chinese.

Following this, a number of questions can be raised:

- A. What is the image of the subjects under study towards the Chinese?
- B. Is there any differences between sexes and Anti-Chinese feeling?
- C. Is there any differences between education levels and Anti-Chinese feeling?
- D. What are the reasons for this image of the Chinese?

The following hypotheses are specifically formulated:

1. Individuals who score high on the Conformity scale, and whose friends are negative towards the Chinese, will have a tendency to have a negative image of the Chinese (as measured by the Anti-Chinese scale), regardless of their score on the F scale.

2. Individuals who score high on the F scale will have a tendency to have a negative image of the Chinese, regardless of their score on the Conformity scale.

3. In the previous discussion of intolerance of ambiguity, mention was made of the authoritarian personality, which is characterized by a low tolerance of ambiguity.

In general, whereas the high F. scale people will tend to maintain the original impressions, the low F. Scale people will tend to change their impressions.