

Guest Editorial: Qualitative Research on Prejudice

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Central topics and challenges for current social research on prejudice and discrimination are outlined and discussed with special regard to how such research may benefit from a stronger focus on qualitative and mixed methods perspectives. Such a methodological approach is described as particularly fruitful in dealing with the *context-sensitive flexibility and fragmentation* of prejudiced behavior; the special role of *ideological patterns of justification in such expressions* of prejudice; and the *normative character and reflexivity of prejudice research* itself. The contributions to this issue are then presented against the backdrop of this theoretical and methodological framework.

The discrimination and persecution of minority groups on the basis of stereotypical patterns of perception is still a highly relevant and prevailing problem in modern societies. Recent incidents such as the mass murder committed by Anders Breivik in Norway, the violent attacks against Romani people in the Czech Republic, anti-Semitic hate speech against intellectuals in Hungary, or the serial killing of immigrants by the right wing terrorist group Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (National Socialist Underground) in Germany point to the urgent necessity of interdisciplinary research on prejudice and stereotyping.

But the social issue of prejudiced behavior is not limited to fierce and open antipathy or violent hate crimes. Research must also face the challenge of coping with elusive and latent forms of prejudice that occur in a variety of different guises in complex sociopolitical contexts. Such contexts constitute the ideological framework in which more violent expressions of prejudice and discrimination are embedded. In conceptualizing for example subtle racism (Pettigrew and Meertens 1995), benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske 2012; Jackman 1996), and institutional discrimination (Pager and Shepherd 2008), research has acknowledged “the inadequacy of defining prejudice solely as an antipathy” (Dovidio et al. 2005, 11). This concentration on the flexible, less easily

defined expressions of prejudice and their embedment in everyday interaction coincides with a critical reassessment of two other “foundational assumptions of the prejudice problematic, notably its individualistic orientation and its assumptions about the role played by cognitive irrationality” (Dixon and Levine 2012, 3). The problem of individualism has been criticized as an “over-psychologization” (Billig 1991, 126) of the phenomenon in question and an indicator of disregard for prejudice as a social issue with fluid boundaries towards broader topics such as social inequality, nationalism, and ethnicity. The psychological monopoly on the notion of prejudice is thus criticized for misconstruing prejudice as “a personal pathology, a failure of inner-directed empathy and intellect, rather than a social pathology, shaped by power relations and the conflicting vested interests of groups” (Wetherell 2012, 165). Even though most of today’s psychological prejudice research has acknowledged the situated and contextual character of prejudiced action, an integrated theory of social and psychological aspects of prejudice is still under development and is often hindered by rigid disciplinary cultures and boundaries.

The criticism of an overly individualistic perspective on prejudice is closely connected to the question of the putative irrationality or falseness of stereotypes: The limits of the

“classical” Allportian criterion of prejudice as based on “faulty and inflexible generalization[s]” (Allport [1954] 1979, 9) have been extensively discussed by authors who attempted to develop a more differentiated view on the propositional content of prejudiced expressions (Jussim et al. 2009; Wetherell and Potter 1992, 67 ff.). Proponents of “Rhetorical Psychology” have argued that the falseness of prejudice talk is not of a propositional but rather of a rhetorical or performative and ultimately normative nature (Billig 1991, 38–39). Although it cannot be denied that ignorance, false beliefs, and bigotry are important sources of discrimination, many instances of prejudice occur in the gray areas of normative rhetoric, which is typically concerned with what ought to be, not what can be settled by mere facts. This perspective has led many researchers in the field to reflexively reconsider their normative stance and the part they play in the rhetorical “game” of talk about prejudice and its (scientific) critique (Wetherell 2012, 176; Dixon et al. 2012).

But since egalitarian and anti-prejudice norms have – at least officially – become an established and widely accepted normative standard in most democratic societies, reflexivity is today a feature not only of prejudice research but also of much of today’s prejudice itself: An important feature of contemporary prejudiced action is often a contradictory, sometimes paradoxical, self-awareness by which justifications of prejudiced or discriminatory speech become an integral part of prejudiced rhetoric. Today a substantial portion of infractions of equality norms are not explicitly directed *against* equality, they rather present themselves as *readings of* egalitarian norms: Where “traditional” overt racism claims the natural inferiority of respective out-groups, modern racism seeks to legitimize its position by tropes of diversity and fairness; where “traditional” homophobia marks LGBT sexual orientations as pathological and immoral, its modern expressions present themselves as an egalitarian defense of traditional lifestyles. Thus, as Margaret Wetherell points out with regard to the analysis of racist discourse, “an important part of anti-racist practice is identifying the forms legitimation takes, and charting also the fragmented and dilemmatic nature of everyday discourse, because it is at those points of fracture and contradiction that there is scope for change and the redirection of argument” (Wetherell 2012, 176).

The theoretical focus shift from prejudice as an individual attribute to prejudice as a social, context-embedded phenomenon that increasingly employs an ideologically reflexive rhetoric is strongly connected to methodological questions about empirical research into stereotyping and prejudice. In the wake of linguistic, cultural, and practical turns in the social sciences, qualitative research methods have long since become an integral part of prejudice research and have initiated considerable development in our understanding of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. More strongly than the predominant quantitative methodology of prejudice research, qualitative research is focused on prejudice as a variety of often ambivalent, fragmented, and particularly context-related phenomena. This focus section aims to fill a specific gap in the research literature on prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination: While the methodological and methodical chapters in recent handbooks on prejudice almost exclusively deal with quantitative methods (Dovidio et al. 2010; Nelson 2009; Petersen and Six 2008), handbooks and monographs on qualitative methods show hardly any interest in the topic of prejudice. The present focus section seeks to add to this particular area of research by highlighting the specific potential and contributions of qualitative studies in prejudice research. However, the strengths of qualitative methods in reconstructing the interpretative repertoires (Wetherell and Potter 1992), rhetorical functions, and context specific flexibilities of prejudice should not be played off against standardized research methods. Recent debates about the relation between qualitative and quantitative methods have made clear that attempts to strictly separate qualitative and quantitative methodological paradigms are based on very shaky methodological foundations (Kelle 2008; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009) and serve to constrain rather than foster critical and innovative social research. Furthermore, like quantitative research, qualitative approaches also exhibit weak points of their own and can profit from a quantitative perspective just as much as vice versa. Just as efforts to theoretically advance prejudice research clearly benefit from a crossing of disciplinary divides between psychological, sociological, historical and other approaches, the answer to the accompanying methodological questions can be neither strictly qualitative nor strictly quantitative. Instead, from a perspective of method triangulation, research designs in which qualitative and quantitative methods show

“complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses” (Johnson and Turner, quoted in Kelle 2008, 47) may advance prejudice research to a considerable degree.

The introductory remarks above have outlined three major topics for “qualitative research on prejudice:”

- the context-sensitive flexibility and fragmentation of prejudiced behavior;
- its normative ambivalence with regard to egalitarian norms and the special role of the ideological patterns of justification emerging from it; and
- methodological considerations concerning the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative research methods and the normative character of prejudice research itself.

The contributions presented in this focus section deal with these aspects of prejudice research in various ways, highlighting the specific strengths of qualitative perspectives and multi-method approaches.

Peter Martin’s contribution shows that when anti-racism becomes a generally accepted cultural and societal norm, racialized practices of discrimination and identity construction may take on ambivalent and reflexive forms. Martin seeks to accommodate those new forms of racial prejudice through the concept of “differentialist racism,” a form of out-group construction that relies mainly on rigid cultural distinctions while presenting itself as anti-racist. In his mixed-methods design, Martin initially shows how participants in a standardized survey of London residents simultaneously endorse anti-racism and differentialism. For this purpose, he uses a newly developed scale for everyday differentialism. In the second step, qualitative interviews conducted with members of a subsample from the survey show how the interview partners reconcile contradictory racist and anti-racist orientations. Martin argues for a mixed-methods approach and discusses strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative approaches towards prejudice: By employing and combining qualitative and quantitative methods, patterns of ambivalent prejudice can be extensively described and their prevalence in a certain population can be statistically estimated. Additionally, qualitative and quantitative methods proved to be produc-

tive for cross-validating the operationalization of differentialist racism.

Jessica Walton, Naomi Priest, and Yin Paradies focus on lay conceptions of prejudice, a topic rarely addressed in current research, and seek to close this gap by drawing on cognitive interviews and focus groups. The data show that while manifest racism is predominantly conceived as offensive, strongly emotional, and violent, more subtle or even benevolent forms of racialized discrimination or stereotyping are often not recognized as problematic. Furthermore, participants’ assessments of whether an utterance can be seen as racist speech focused on the assumed intentions of speakers, on the relation between speaker and addressees, and on the potential for direct offense. Racialized discourse is thus rated acceptable if it is uttered in a familiar social environment with no obvious intent of harming anybody and if it does not directly offend persons present. These results can also be differentiated with regard to the participants’ class and social status: Interviewees with a working class background were more likely to regard racialized talk as non-racist if it was uttered in informal talk among friends (joking, etc.) or if it did not directly (physically) harm anyone. Benefits of the triangulation of data from focus groups and cognitive interviews are discussed with regard to their complementary character: While interviews were used to investigate individual understandings of examples of racialized talk, focus groups centered on the most consensual and common aspects of lay theorizing.

Felix Knappertsbusch discusses the limits of current conceptualizations of anti-Americanism and in the process deals with the general problem of conceptualizing prejudice and operationalizing such concepts for empirical research. Typical attempts at deriving nominal definitions by naming core criteria often cause serious difficulties for empirical researchers, who must decide whether such criteria are met in the data. Furthermore, such definitions also display theoretical deficits since they often fail to account for the great variety and variability of anti-American utterances. Finally, this approach does not pay enough attention to the importance of the social and ideological context of prejudiced speech. To address these problems, Knappertsbusch proposes a practice theoretical turn in the conceptualization of anti-Americanism: Instead of searching for a “true essence”

of anti-Americanism, empirical research should treat such prejudice as an open network of speech acts bound by family resemblances rather than by overarching criteria of identity. In this way, researchers are relieved of the insurmountable task of looking for a minimal set of criteria for, or a common denominator of, anti-Americanism. An adequate theoretical analysis and understanding of anti-American speech which considers its “situated use” and context-dependence requires its *in vivo* study through a close investigation of empirical instances. Adopting such a performative perspective, Knappertsbusch uses qualitative interviews to analyze the interplay between different conceptions of America in their situated use. In this way, different forms of “use in context” of anti-American utterances are described where seemingly paradoxical strategies of stereotyping help to preserve and stabilize nationalist identity constructions.

E. Rosemary McKeever, Richard Reed, Samuel Pehrson, Lesley Storey, and J. Christopher Cohrs investigated discursive means of legitimizing violence against (immigrant) minority groups. Within the theoretical framework of discourse analysis and rhetorical psychology, they provide an account of how violent attacks on a Belfast immigrant community are legitimized through the dehumanization of the target group and its construal as a threat to the racial-national in-group. The authors provide an exemplary analysis of a leaflet circulated in the loyalist Donegall Pass area of Belfast demanding the removal of the Chinese population. From a practice theoretical perspective, two main discursive effects can be reconstructed within the pamphlet: A “community-focused discourse” serves to naturalize the ethnic and cultural boundaries between the in-group and the Chinese minority and marks the latter as morally inferior. A “martial discourse” then constructs the scenario of an immigrant threat to the local community and legitimizes violent action against minority members as a defensive strategy. This aggressive out-group construction is then discussed in relation to the corresponding in-group construction: The discursive strategy of the leaflet is shown to draw on fears that continually resonate in the history of loyalist culture.

Vera King, Hans-Christoph Koller, and Janina Zölch address the victim perspective with regard to stereotyping and discrimination: What are the psychological and social con-

sequences of being a target of prejudice, stigmatization and discriminatory practices? Their research focuses on Turkish families in Germany, who often experience a somewhat paradoxical life situation between mobility and immobility: Having covered huge geographical distances to start a new life, they find themselves trapped in highly segregated residential quarters and in a situation with rather limited prospects for social advancement. Under these circumstances, parents often develop great hopes and high aspirations concerning their children’s success in the German educational system. However, their offspring may experience serious difficulties there – even children and adolescents who never migrated themselves are frequently treated as immigrants due to their families’ ethnic background. Discrimination in schools and a lack of familiarity with dominant cultural codes impacts the educational careers of young Turks and may lead to disappointment, feelings of shame and guilt, and severe tension within families. To develop a better understanding of the coping strategies employed to deal with these problems, narrative interviews were conducted with young males and their parents. Koller and colleagues found that the strategies developed by families to cope with discrimination and marginalization are handed down to subsequent generations in remarkably different ways. Two types of dealing with marginalization are presented in detail: Parents may desperately strive to escape marginalization through perfect (“hyper”-)integration and thereby deny experiences of discrimination and conceal the resulting hardships and aggressions. As a consequence, children may display unfocused and explosive forms of rebellion at school which endanger their educational accomplishments. A contrasting case study presents parents who were allowed to talk freely about experiences of powerlessness and distress related to their marginalized situation as migrants. This openness also helped them to develop role models as active citizens who proactively work for the betterment of their situation.

Oliver Decker, Katharina Rothe, Marliese Weissmann, Johannes Kiess, and Elmar Brähler center their article on social psychological mechanisms which bring about the statistical correlation between right-wing orientations and economic disintegration. With their qualitative research, they follow up on a survey on right-wing extremism in Germany in which the well-known association of right-wing attitudes

on the one hand and social and economic deprivation on the other hand was replicated. Quantitative and qualitative methods are integrated in a sequential mixed-methods design to understand and explain this statistical correlation through a psychoanalytically oriented analysis of focus group discussions. Interpreting data from those discussions, the authors conclude that the narcissistic trauma of German national identity caused by the Second World War was relieved and covered by the economic prosperity of the immediate post-war era. If, however, this “narcissistic filling” is removed, as is the case during the current recession, the economically deprived return to their traditional means of restoring feelings of national strength and unity by ostracizing and blaming migrants and other supposedly harmful groups. Thus, by drawing on a mixed-methods design, the authors were able to interpret and explain findings from a quantitative study and develop a detailed and historically situated account of how deprivation and right-wing extremist attitudes are functionally connected in everyday discourse.

Bjoern Milbradt’s contribution deals with the syndrome character of prejudice from an epistemological and language theoretical perspective. He criticizes the traditional and still predominant psychological concept of stereotyping and prejudice as “inner states,” offering instead a speech-act-theoretical approach. This perspective is developed along the lines of the Frankfurt School of critical theory as well as the rhetorical psychology of Michael Billig. In Milbradt’s reading of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the *Authoritarian Personality*, the notions of ticket-thinking and stereotyping are used as a theoretical framework to understand and depict a certain disintegration of the linguistic means of perception taking place in modern capitalist societies. However, language simultaneously offers the potential for emancipation through individual reference to particular objects and for coercion through their inflexible categorization. Consequently, the ability to reflect on this double potential is the precondition of free and flexible (and therefore accurate) perception. Stereotyping is defined as the loss of this reflexive ability, which results in perception becoming a mere “propaganda trial” in which any object is subjected to a preconceived judgment. This mechanism of “rigid notions” is carved out as the overarching feature leading to a syndrome-like coherence of different forms of prejudice. Using excerpts from Norwegian

mass-murderer Anders Behring Breivik’s manifesto, Milbradt exemplifies such a reified and essentially imperceptive mode of speaking, in which every object is rigidly subsumed under the schemata of an overall world view. In this paper, qualitative methods of social research are discussed for their potential to reconstruct the different forms and expressions which such stereotypical language may take.

As can be seen from the summaries given above, this focus section displays the wide theoretical and methodological diversity of current qualitative research on prejudice, which is nevertheless bound together by certain leitmotifs. Results from qualitative research in this field demonstrate, on the one hand, limits of quantitative monomethod research as well as of social psychological concepts like “attitude” or “stereotype.” On the other hand, the contributions do not dismiss quantitative approaches, but rather stress their benefits. Although the focus section lays strong emphasis on qualitative methods, it also reflects current trends in social research to bridge the gap between methodological paradigms and to address research problems without reinforcing established disciplinary and methodological divides. Whilst surveys are able to tell us more about tendencies in the dissemination of attitudes, a closer examination of interviews or focus groups may tell us more about ambivalences of prejudice (cf. Martin in this issue) as well as of the discursive relation of a phenomenon that remains relatively unclear if it is solely researched in a quantitative paradigm (cf. Decker et al. in this issue). In the process of such an examination, both qualitative and quantitative approaches have to cope with the “systematic ambiguity” (Winch 2008 [1958], 25) of meaningful social action. This ambiguity cannot be dissolved by applying nominal definitions to the object of our research (cf. Knappertsbusch in this issue). That is, if we take seriously the linguistic turn and its epistemological consequences, we cannot reasonably speak of *the* prejudice or *the* stereotype (Milbradt) without methodically taking into account the flexibility of their situated expression. Standardization and nominal definitions are *one* way to cope with those challenges, but they have certain shortcomings that must be critically reflected. One possibility to foster such reflection is the use of mixed methods designs: The use of methods of survey research, experiments, interviews, focus groups, or ethnographic fieldwork should not be regarded as a mere con-

sequence of the fact that researchers are rooted in mutually exclusive paradigms. Rather, these approaches can be seen as different but complementary expressions of the common *theoretical* goal of deepening our understanding of the phenomena in question. In accommodating recent efforts of social psychology to take into account ambivalences as well as situational factors and sociopolitical contexts, current research on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination intensifies its efforts to arrive at an interdisciplinary research program that deals with various forms of social practices

rather than with solely individual or mental phenomena. Thus, the handing down of experiences of stigmatization and discrimination between generations (cf. King et al. in this issue), the legitimization of racist violence (cf. McKeever et al. in this issue) and the situational development of acceptance or rejection of racist discourse (cf. Walton et al. in this issue) shed light on the necessity of developing an interdisciplinary research framework that does not level down the strengths of different approaches, but joins them together in a productive collaborative effort.

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