

# **Social Psychology of Prejudice:**

*Historical and  
Contemporary Issues*

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# I Accidentally Became a Prejudice Researcher

Chris Crandall

I stumbled into prejudice research through the back door. As a high school student, I knew that I wanted to be a psychologist. Although I grew up in the 1960's and 1970's, racial tension was reasonably low in my town (Seattle) compared to the rest of the country, and pretty low in my mixed-race, mixed-social class high school, too. Within normal limits, Asians, Blacks, Whites, Native Americans and Latinos took the same classes, competed on the same sports teams, and joined the same clubs and social groups. The study of prejudice seemed to me to be more of an intellectual pursuit, and a social problem for someone else. I think I believed that I, and my general neighborhood, was morally superior to other cities with racial strife. While I now know better, it's hard for me to personally drop the hypothesis. In this way, my research is also my penance.

By the time of my first class in psychology in my first term at college, I knew I wanted to be a researcher, not a therapist. Everything I learned about psychology interested me, and after a personality class I decided that I was going to be a personality researcher, after a child psychology class I decided that I was going to be a developmental researcher, and so on.

At the University of Washington, I was invited into R.C. Bolles's animal learning lab, to help run studies on the acquisition of taste preferences. At first, I thought rat psychology was for nerds, and I also didn't realize the field was rapidly approaching extinction. But the chance to work with a famous psychologist led to experience that piqued my interest in food and eating, and this led in graduate school to taste exposure research, which in turn led to social influence on eating disorders, which in turn led to research on attitudes toward fat people.

In the end, the real impetus came from a fellow graduate student at the University of Michigan—Judy Shapiro—who asked me to collaborate on a study on prejudice against fat people (which we never actually managed to run). But we collected some preliminary data and found some interesting effects—most notably that a handful of social/political beliefs were at the foundation of anti-fat prejudice. Further research in fat prejudice led to role of attributions and judgments of responsibility, which in turn led to more general research on prejudice, until suddenly I was a full-blown prejudice researcher. I'm still not sure exactly how I got here.

It was through this back door that I became a prejudice researcher. It was neither personal experience, nor was it perspicacity. I always thought that prejudice research was for the smartest, the most committed, the

best read, the finest researchers. And, after some experience, I've come to know this is true. But there's some room left for the rest of us, too.