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Pride and Prejudice: A Causative Factor of Crime

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ABSTRACT

Prejudice consists in holding negative attitudes or stereotypes about individuals or groups on grounds such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender or social class. It is a principal cause of hate crime, in which offences are committed against individuals for belonging to a particular group, caste or community, and which may range from verbal harassment to physical violence and even murder. Pride is a sense of superiority or entitlement which, when felt in excess, leads to the undermining and disregard of the rights of others. In order to assert their superiority over others, people tend to offend when something obstructs them or wounds their pride. This article examines the correlation between pride, prejudice and the commission of crime, and the effect each of the two has upon the other. Criminological theories bearing on offences committed out of pride or prejudice are also considered, so as to offer a study of the relationship between pride, prejudice and crime with reference to criminological theory.

Keywords: *Pride, prejudice, crime*

I. INTRODUCTION

Crimes and criminal acts are caused for a variety of reasons. Of the offences that do not fall within the familiar explanation of poverty, a substantial number are the product of pride. People take pride in many aspects of their lives, from family and social standing to their valuable possessions. Anything that wounds a person's pride may instigate a criminal act. As Teiresias says in Sophocles' ANTIGONE, "all men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong, and repairs the evil. The only crime is pride" (Sophocles, trans. 1939). Pride changes the mindset of a person and moves him to offend. When a person commits a crime, his conscience warns him of the wrong he has done, but the pride or ego he holds blinds that conscience and prevents him from accepting the wrong. Instead, ego encourages him to commit further acts in order to prove that the crime he committed was right. This consequence of pride contributes to the rise in the crime rate.

Another important cause of crime considered in this article is prejudice. Unlike pride, prejudice tends to aggravate the seriousness of the offence. Prejudice motivated crime is itself prevalent:

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where a person commits an offence against an individual or a group because of a perceived hatred, the offence is prejudice motivated (VICTORIA POLICE, n.d.), and hate crime falls within that category (METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE, n.d.). Apart from being a cause of offending, prejudice also plays an important part in whom the public and the police suspect, and in who is ultimately convicted. When a crime is committed, many people are inclined to suspect a particular group or community because of preconceived ideas about it.

A relationship has always existed between pride, prejudice and the commission of crime. This article examines that relationship and its significance.

II. PRIDE AS A CAUSE OF CRIME

One of the significant causes of crime is pride. A person takes pride in a variety of things which shape his personality directly or indirectly. Ordinarily, when a person does wrong he is able to identify the wrong on his part; whether he repents for it is a separate question, but his conscience corrects him when he goes wrong. A sense of pride blinds a person to that conscience, and he justifies his act instead of accepting that it was wrong. This is chiefly because the pride a person carries creates a sense of dominance in his mind and in his conduct, and that dominance allows him to justify what he has done. He then begins to treat those around him with markedly less respect, which breeds frustration among them and results in conflict; the point is put in similar terms in popular commentary on pride and offending (Quaye, 2009). Such conflicts in turn produce crime.

Several other traits arise out of pride, among them ego, selfishness and the habit of belittling others by one's attitude. These traits increase the intensity of the conflict. Pride expressed at the level of groups creates divisions in society, with multiple groups forming and competing against one another and creating difficulty. This places a strain on the peace and order of society.

Pride is among the principal reasons for the commission of caste based and gender based crime. The severity of a caste based offence tends to increase with the pride an offender takes in his caste, and offending of this kind persists in Indian society today. Honour killing, caste violence and the ill treatment of persons belonging to particular communities have been analysed as expressions of pride taken in caste (Mishra, n.d.). Offences of this kind may also arise out of collective caste pride. The difficulty with group pride of this kind is that when one member commits an offence, the group closes ranks and conceals the act, so that the offender escapes punishment and the victim is denied justice. Honour killing illustrates the point, for even a grave offence such as murder is concealed.

III. INTERPRETATION WITH THEORIES OF CRIMINOLOGY

A. Conflict theory and group conflict

Conflict theory treats conflict as an inevitable feature of society. The conflicts arise from difference and inequality between groups, which generate a competition between them that in turn produces crime (Siegel, 2000).

Pride as a cause of crime is best placed within group conflict theory, whose principal proponent was George B. Vold. Vold set out that theory in *THEORETICAL CRIMINOLOGY* (Vold, 1958), a work that has shaped criminological thought on the place of social conflict in the explanation of crime and that remains in print in revised editions (Bernard et al., 2015). Group conflict theory is Vold's own contribution rather than a restatement of a broader conflict perspective, and it locates the explanation of crime in competition between organised interest groups rather than in the pathology of the individual offender.

Social conflict. Vold argued that much criminal behaviour is a by-product of conflict between groups within society. Groups form because their members share interests that can be advanced collectively, and they come into conflict when those interests overlap and compete, often against a background of inequality and unequal power (Vold, 1958).

Group conflict. On Vold's account, crime is not solely an individual phenomenon but is rooted in group loyalty, group organisation and the structure of society. In a large class of cases he described the offender as a member of a minority group whose conduct the dominant group has succeeded in defining as criminal (Vold, 1958).

Power and control. Vold treated law making and law enforcement as political processes. The object of group competition is control of the legislature and of the police power of the state, and the group that secures a legislative majority determines which conduct will be treated as criminal (Vold, 1958; Bernard et al., 2015).

Societal reaction. Vold's theory also bears on the way society responds to offending, since the enactment and enforcement of the criminal law may either sharpen or moderate the underlying conflict. The narrower proposition that the societal reaction itself generates further deviance belongs to labelling theory, which is taken up below. Vold's own claim is that conflict arises where two groups within the same society hold incompatible interests, and that crime may operate as one group's response to conduct by another that threatens its way of life (Vold, 1958).

As discussed earlier, when individuals who take pride in a particular attribute combine into a group with a shared interest, they come into conflict with others in society. When such groups

seek to assert their power or dominance, others may resort to crime by way of defence. Pride among individuals thus generates a sense of dominance, and crime becomes the means by which others in society answer it.

IV. PREJUDICE AS A CAUSE OF CRIME

Prejudice is a preconceived thought or idea that a person holds about another, which creates a feeling of dislike towards that person or causes him to devalue the other's capacities. Prejudice may rest on sex, race, religion or age, among other grounds, and it may take a direct or an indirect form. Prejudice of any type or form causes harm. How does prejudice cause harm? Is it wrong to hold a preconceived idea about someone or something? Is it not a measure that protects us from future harm? These are the questions ordinarily put in justification of prejudice. Answering them is necessary in order to understand the part prejudice plays in the causation of crime. When a person who holds a prejudice approaches or speaks to another who falls within a stereotyped community, the manner in which he addresses or engages with that person differs markedly from the way he engages with others (Wickes & Benier, 2017). The preconception in his mind does not allow him to accept the other person. As this continues, the feeling of dislike hardens into hatred, and hatred is the root of the offence. It moves the prejudiced person to attack and to harm others. Racially motivated killing in the United States is the clearest illustration.

Prejudice affects not only the offender but also the victim. A person who is subjected to such stereotyping may, under social pressure, come to behave as the person the stereotype predicted he would be. Even where he has done nothing that society prejudged him capable of, people fail to believe him and instead accuse him of the act, so that a further wrong is done. The position of a young person from a lower class community when an offence occurs in the neighbourhood is an example: though he has committed no offence, he may be punished for it.

Prejudice also affects the criminal justice system. Research on stop and search shows that prejudicial stereotypes inform the formation of police suspicion and contribute to the ethnic disproportionality of those stopped (Minhas & Walsh, 2021), and perceptions of police prejudice among minority youth have themselves been studied as a correlate of delinquency (Ra, 2018). Where an offence is committed, the first suspicion of the police may fall upon a community that has long been stereotyped. The method of investigation applied to members of that group may differ from that applied to others, and offenders and innocent persons alike from such a community may face a more difficult and less impartial process. Economic modelling of prejudice in adjudication suggests that where imprisonment is the penalty, poorer defendants

face a stronger prior prejudice at trial and are convicted on less evidence than richer defendants (Curry & Klumpp, 2009). The assumption that people living in slums and other urban poor areas are principally responsible for criminal activity is a prejudice of the same order. In the United States, Black adults continue to be imprisoned at several times the rate of white adults (Carson & Kluckow, 2023).

V. INTERPRETATION OF THEORIES

A. Labelling theory

Labelling theory is a sociological perspective in criminology concerned with how individuals and societies label and react to deviant behaviour, and with the way that reaction shapes the identity and the future conduct of those who are labelled deviant. Its central claim is that it is not the act itself that makes a person a criminal or a deviant, but the societal reaction to that act (Becker, 1963; Plummer, 2001). Its key concepts may be stated as follows.

Primary deviance. This is Lemert's term for the initial act of rule breaking or deviance. It may be a single occurrence or a relatively minor infraction. At this stage the individual is not yet treated by society as a deviant, and the conduct does not alter his self conception (Lemert, 1951).

Social reaction. Labelling theory argues that it is the reaction of society, including law enforcement, the media and members of the community, that turns primary deviance into secondary deviance. Once a person is labelled a deviant or a criminal, he faces social stigma and its consequences (Becker, 1963).

Secondary deviance. Secondary deviance occurs where a person who has been labelled internalises the deviant identity and continues to engage in criminal or deviant behaviour, employing the deviant role as a means of defence, attack or adjustment to the problems that the labelling has created. At this stage the person may embrace the new identity and become part of a deviant subculture (Lemert, 1951).

Master status. A deviant label may become a person's master status. The label comes to define his identity and overshadows his other social roles, such as student, employee or family member (Hughes, 1945).

Self fulfilling prophecy. A person labelled a deviant may conform to society's expectation and offend further, so reinforcing the negative label and producing a cycle of criminality (Merton, 1948).

Stigmatisation. Stigmatisation refers to the adverse social reaction and the discrimination faced by those labelled deviant. It may include the loss of opportunity, discrimination in employment and social isolation (Goffman, 1963).

Deviant subcultures. Labelling theory recognises the part played by deviant subcultures in supplying a sense of belonging and identity to those who have been labelled, offering an alternative social structure to persons who have been stigmatised (Becker, 1963).

Labelling theory therefore displaces the traditional focus on the causes of criminal behaviour in favour of the societal reaction to deviance (Plummer, 2001). It has influenced the criminal justice system and has prompted discussion of restorative justice and of alternative approaches to deviant behaviour that are directed at rehabilitation and social reintegration rather than at punishment.

Labelling is central to prejudice as a cause of crime. A person is labelled because of preconceived ideas held about him, and the action taken against him proceeds upon those same ideas. This is one of the principal reasons why a disproportionate share of the prison population is drawn from particular communities and from the economically weaker sections. Authorities and officials may also treat offenders from those sections differently from offenders of the middle or upper classes. This in turn shapes the outlook of society at large, where prejudiced ideas about persons from certain classes take hold and deepen social division.

VI. CORRELATION BETWEEN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Pride and prejudice are each serious causes of the causation of crime when taken separately; taken together they are graver still. When the two combine, a darker side of human nature comes into view. A person already proud of his status or of some other attribute, meeting a person about whom he holds preconceived dislike, behaves altogether differently towards him. An aggressive side of the person becomes visible, and he shows open disrespect towards the other as a consequence of his ego and his sense of dominance. This may at times escalate into conflict between groups or communities.

Honour killing is among the clearest examples of prejudice and pride operating together in the causation of crime (Mishra, n.d.). It occurs where a couple in a relationship, or a married couple, belonging to different castes or communities, one regarded as higher and the other as lower, are murdered by their own kin or by the wider community. Either partner may be killed, or the partner from the community regarded as lower may be killed by members of the other. Those who regard their own community as higher already hold preconceived ideas about the nature and character of the community they regard as lower, and they take excessive pride in their

caste. When an event that wounds that pride occurs, such as an inter caste marriage, they do not hesitate to offend. Pride and prejudice in combination are therefore a principal factor in the causation of crime.

VII. CONCLUSION

Pride and prejudice are among the most important factors in the causation of crime, yet the measures taken to reduce or eradicate the offences they produce are very few. Neither has been recognised as a cause of offending to the extent of the damage it does. This is chiefly because pride and prejudice are core elements that operate through a range of other factors, and it is the other factors that are highlighted rather than the core element. The immediate or proximate reason for the offence at the time of the event is taken into account, but not the motive that lay behind it.

The criminal justice system, whose task is to do justice, also falls prey to pride and prejudice. The result is a large number of prejudice motivated imprisonments, through which innocent persons suffer for acts in which they were never involved. This situation needs to change. Rather than taking the easier course of identifying offenders by arresting members of a particular community, the criminal justice system should not hesitate to investigate properly. Alongside changes in the criminal justice system, change in the mindset and mentality of society is equally important. Prejudiced thoughts and ideas should be eradicated at their roots, and pride in attributes that no person has created for himself should equally be given up. Compassion towards fellow human beings should be cultivated if change in society is to be brought about.

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