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PREJUDICE & STEREOTYPES

UNDERSTANDING THE COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL ROOTS OF SOCIAL BIAS

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What is a Stereotype?

A stereotype is a cognitive schema, an overgeneralized belief about members of a particular social group.

It helps the mind categorize people quickly, but it reduces individuality.

Stereotypes can be positive or negative, yet both are problematic because they ignore personal differences and promote rigid social thinking.



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What is Prejudice?

Prejudice refers to a negative emotional evaluation of a group and its members. It is primarily affective in nature. In the ABC model of attitude:

- Affective component = Prejudice
- Behavioral component = Discrimination
- Cognitive component = Stereotype

Understanding this distinction clarifies how thoughts, feelings, and actions connect.



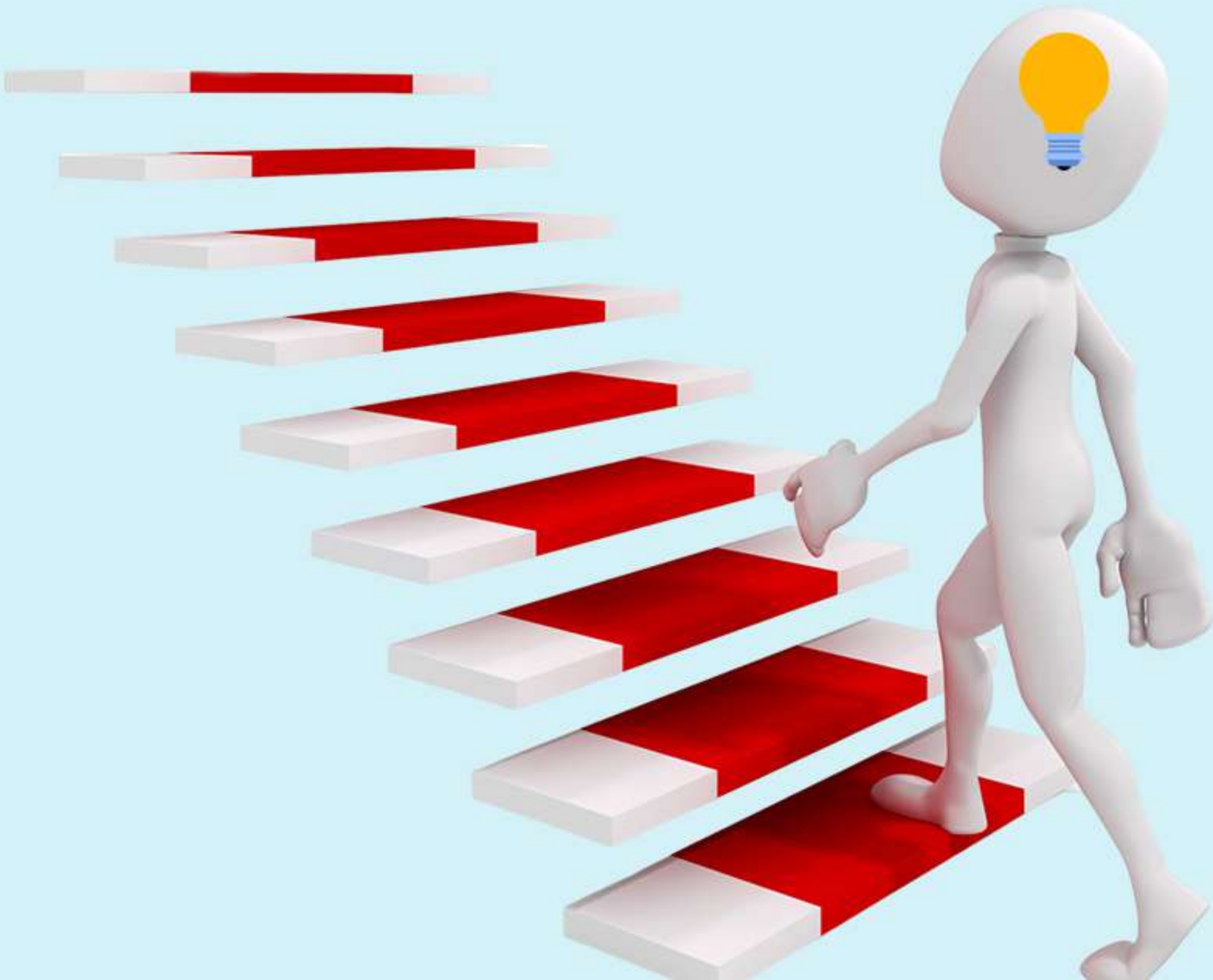
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From Belief to Behavior

Stereotypes (beliefs) can lead to prejudice (feelings), which may result in discrimination (behavior).

Discrimination is the outward expression of bias. However, this progression is not automatic. Social norms, personal values, and legal frameworks often prevent prejudiced attitudes from turning into discriminatory actions.



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Early Theoretical Foundation

Gordon Allport, in The Nature of Prejudice (1954), explained prejudice as a learned attitude shaped by social categorization.

He argued that normal cognitive processes —like grouping people — can unintentionally produce bias.

This shifted the focus from “bad individuals” to everyday psychological mechanisms.



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Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel proposed that people derive part of their self-esteem from group memberships.

Even minimal group distinctions can create in-group favoritism and out-group bias.

This shows that prejudice does not always arise from conflict; simple categorization itself can trigger bias.



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Reducing Prejudice – Contact Hypothesis

Gordon Allport suggested that meaningful interaction between groups reduces prejudice, especially when conditions include equal status, shared goals, cooperation, and institutional support.

Later research supported this idea, showing that structured intergroup contact can gradually modify stereotypes and emotional responses.



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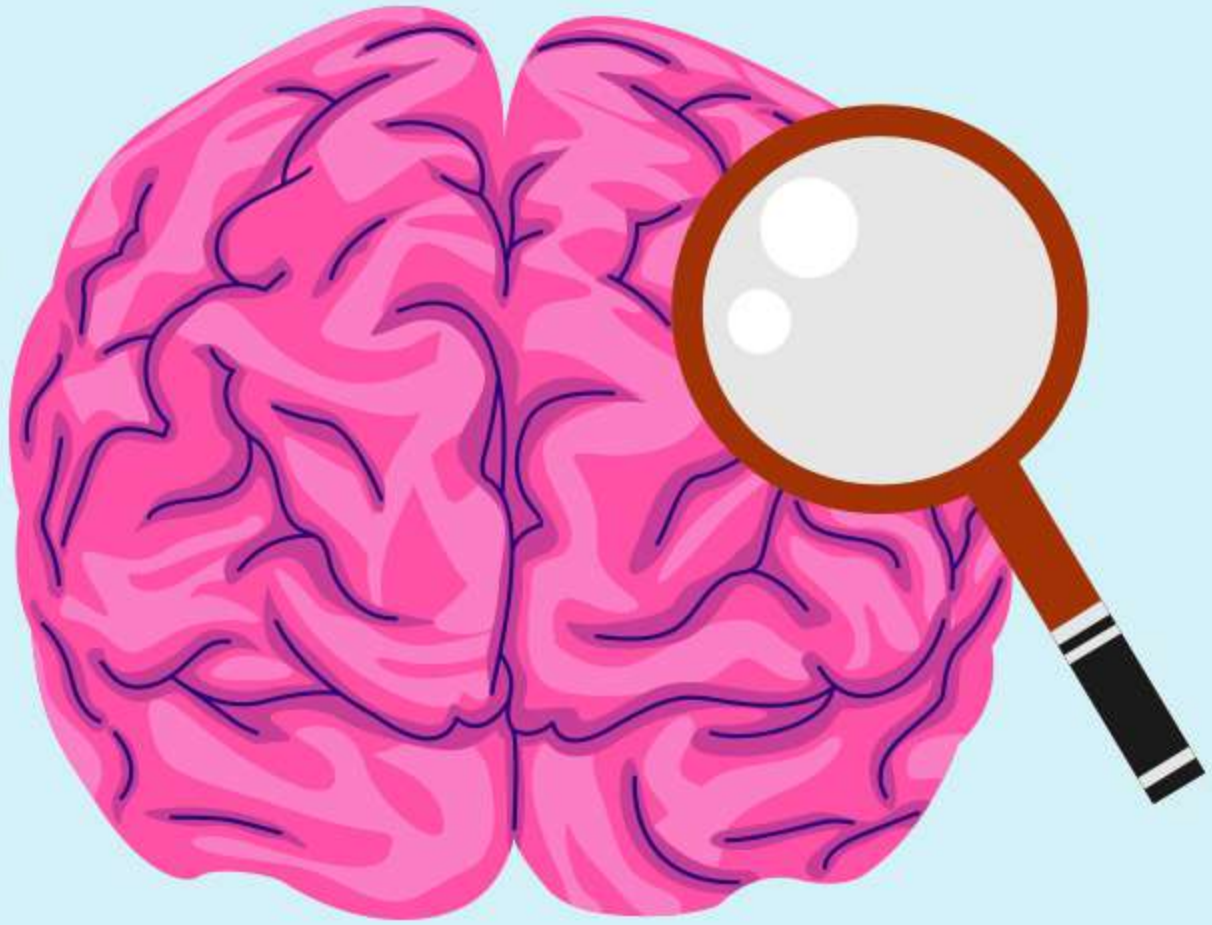
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Takeaway

Stereotypes shape how we think.

Prejudice shapes how we feel.

Discrimination shapes how we act.



Together, they form an interconnected system influenced by cognition, identity, and social structure.

Understanding their relationship helps explain how bias develops and how it can be challenged and changed.

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