

PREJUDICE

Its effects on the individual

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Prejudice

Prejudice-*n-* negative feelings and judgments about individuals or an entire group (racial group, ethnic group, sex, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, social class, etc.) that lacks a foundation of fact. Pre-judgment.

The term prejudice is used frequently in American society. Often, however, it is misused. In reality, prejudice is the seed of a systemic process that has and will continue to lead violence and hatred throughout the United States.

Simply put, prejudice is an unfounded pre-judgment of an individual or group without considering the genuine individuality of a person. The diagram below shows where prejudice begins and to where it leads:

*stereotyping → prejudice → discrimination →
racism/homophobia → scapegoating → genocide*

A Learned Behavior

Prejudice is a learned behavior attained from any number of sources. It is not inherent and therefore, since learned and can be unlearned.

'Nobody is born prejudiced'

The Four Basic Sources of Prejudice

Family: More than from anyone else, we learn prejudice messages from members of our family. At times, these messages are intentional. At times, they are unintentional.

Unmet Basic Needs: If basic human needs such as food and shelter are lacking we are unable to reach levels of abstract thought. Our thoughts remain basic; we are caught in a struggle to survive. As a result, we are unable to comprehend our own irrational beliefs about others.

Frustration-Aggression-Reaction: Those who are easily frustrated in situations are more likely to follow a systemic process that leads them to make conclusions based on prejudice. Unconsciously, prejudice becomes an easy solution for quickly minimizing feelings of frustration or irritability.

Fear: There is an old adage, 'the less you know, the more you fear'. The less we are willing to learn about individuals or members of a group, the more prejudice we feel for them.

As you read through these descriptions of prejudice, think of an individual (even yourself) who you believe may possess prejudice and see if this information correlates with their behaviors.

Also think of someone who you believe may be a victim of prejudice (a person of color, someone who is gay/lesbian, a student or co-worker who does not conform, etc.) and consider the validity of the information given. Do any of the descriptions help to explain why they behave the way they do?


Degrees of Prejudice

Stereotyping: The prejudiced individual perceives those she/he sees as 'different' as a member of a group rather than an individual.

Group Conformity: Prejudiced individuals exclusively feel safe acting as everyone else within his/her 'group'. This is due to the fear she/he possesses for those seen as outsiders to the 'group'. She/he will rarely, if ever, attempt new activities in which the 'group' is not involved.

Protection of Status: The prejudiced individual places the need to be accepted by his/her 'group' above anything else. An example of this would be to make fun of a peer outside the 'group' despite guilty feelings about doing so in order to continue to be accepted.

Insecurity: Poor self-image. A need to put others down to make him/herself feel superior.



Forms of Prejudice: The overt behaviors of the prejudiced individual.

Avoidance: The prejudiced individual avoids individuals or opportunities seen as different due to prejudiced feelings or beliefs. Fear of new situations is an example.

Verbal Aggression: The prejudiced individual lashes out irrationally upon or about those seen as different. "I'm sick and tired of them always complaining about being victimized!"

Violence: Acting out on feelings of prejudice in a destructive way.

Discrimination: Displaying one's prejudice by having it negatively affect the individual who one is prejudiced against. Racial profiling is a form of discrimination.

Segregation: The prejudiced individual separates him/herself from those seen as different. As a result, restricting him/herself from numerous learning experiences.

Sources for this
Article

1. Book: "Race Matters" by Cornel West. Vintage Books 1993.
2. Grant Publication: "Strategies for Working With Culturally Diverse Communities and Clients." By Elizabeth Randall-David, Ph.D.
3. Position Paper: "The Rationale for Diversity Awareness in Education." By Mark Good.

The Price Paid for Possessing Prejudice: How the prejudiced individual suffers.

Rigid Thought: The belief and behavior that things should be a certain way and that there is no reason for any change.

Fearful of Change: This fear is the reason the prejudiced individual possesses a rigid thought process as described above.

Distrustful of Others: Needs constant reassurance and proof that others, both familiar and unfamiliar, can be trusted.

Personal Insecurity: Frequently unsure of one's own worthiness due to the rigid practice of 'group conformity'.

World View in Absolutes: The term 'should' is a common theme in both behavior and beliefs. This characteristic finds the individual unaccepting of differing points of view.

The Price Paid as the Target of Prejudice: How the victim of prejudice suffers.

Stereotyping: The victim of prejudice has difficulty seeing members of another group as individuals. For instance, the belief that all members of a group (racial, political, etc.) are prejudiced.

Personal Doubts: The victim of prejudice can be unsure of his/her own abilities to achieve anything. This might include menial tasks or even important responsibilities. This leads to a self-image that limits the achievement of opportunities such as willful employment.

Feeling of Alienation: Due to being a victim of prejudice, one may feel alone in many situations. This might include shopping in a retail store to the discomfort felt in a workplace environment.

Self-Hatred: This damaging characteristic leads to self-destructive behaviors that can include defiance of educational support, drugs/alcohol abuse and even destruction of personal property. The 1992 L.A. riots have been described as extreme examples of self-hatred due to prejudice.