

Role of Prejudice in the Life of a Person

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Abstract

According to Cambridge Dictionary, prejudice means an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge. Prejudice is an unjustified or incorrect attitude towards an individual. It is normally a negative attitude towards an individual. Normally it is purely based on the individual's membership of a social group. When a person holds prejudiced views towards a certain race or gender etc. (e.g. sexist), it is an instance of prejudice. Discrimination is related to the behavior or actions. It is also usually negative, towards an individual or group of people, particularly on the basis of sex/race/social class, etc. Prejudice can influence a person very deeply as to how to behave and interact with others, particularly with those who differ from them. Prejudice is, as such, a baseless and normally a negative attitude toward members of a group. The salient traits of prejudice are: negative feelings, stereotyped beliefs, and a tendency to discriminate against members of the group. Although specific definitions of prejudice expressed by social scientists often differ yet most of them agree that it involves prejudgments that are usually negative about members of a group. When people have prejudicial attitudes toward others, they are inclined to view everyone who fits into a certain group as being 'all the same'. They brand every individual who holds particular characteristics or beliefs with a very broad category. They do not appreciate a person as a unique individual. Most people have had the experience of prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination at some time in his or her life. There is little doubt that social discrimination, prejudice, and hostility still create serious problems and challenges, even in today's society which considers itself to be very advanced.

Keywords: Discrimination, Judgment, Prejudice, Stereotype

Types of Prejudice

Prejudice can be defined as the judgment of a group or an individual based mainly on group association. Prejudice does not necessarily mean negative. Ethnocentrism is an example of positive prejudice towards one's in-group. Discrimination can be defined as the negative or positive behaviour towards individuals based on their group association. This also has to be understood that discrimination may be obvious or subtle. This can be either damaging. Discrimination and prejudice often go hand in hand, but there is a difference between them. Various factors such as sex, race, age, sexual orientation, nationality,

socioeconomic status, and religion play a decisive role in the prejudice. Some of the prominent types of prejudices are as follows:

- Nationalism
- Religious prejudice
- Racism
- Sexism
- Classicism
- Homophobia
- Ageism
- Xenophobia

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Stereotyping and Prejudice

When a person is affected by prejudice, he may resort to stereotyping, discrimination, and bullying. It has been observed that in many instances, prejudices are based on stereotypes. When a person oversimplifies an assumption about a group based on prior experiences or beliefs, he becomes a stereotype. Stereotypes can be both positive and negative. For example, when a stereotype says that women are caring, it is an example of being positive and when he says that women are not reliable, it is an example of being negative.

Stereotypes can give rise to faulty beliefs. They can also result in prejudice as well as discrimination. Gordon Allport regards both prejudice and stereotypes as a result of normal human thinking. But it's significant to sort information into mental categories to make sense of the world around us. Allport has elaborated that the human mind must think with the aid of categories. He is of the opinion that once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. He suggests that orderly living depends upon it.

Prejudice and Stereotyping: Mental Errors

Normally we categorize people to simplify the process of the worldly affairs. As such we categorize people considering various factors so that we can understand them far better. We may have too much information to sort through all of it in a logical, methodical, and rational manner. Normally when we are able to quickly categorize information, it enables us to interact and react quickly. But it is also a matter of fact that it sometimes leads to errors as well. Prejudice and stereotyping are related to the category of the mental mistakes that arise from our tendency to quickly categorize information in the world around us.

This process of categorization is applicable to the social world as well because we sort people into mental groups which are based on factors such as age, sex, and race.

Research on Categorizing

This fact has come to the notice of the researchers that when we categorize information about people, we get swayed to narrow down the differences between people in certain groups and exaggerate the differences between/among certain groups. One research was conducted in which participants were asked to judge the height of people as shown in photographs. The subjects were also told that in the booklet, the men and women were actually of equal height. They had to match the heights of the men and women pictured. That is, for every woman of a particular height, somewhere in the booklet there was also a man of that same height. Therefore, in order to make as accurate a height judgment as possible, they had to judge each

photograph as an individual case without depending on the person's sex. Over and above these instructions, a \$50 cash prize was also declared to whoever made the most accurate judgments of height. It was amazing to know that despite this whole exercise, subjects consistently judged the men as being a few inches taller than the women. Because of their prejudgment that men are taller than women, the subjects could not dismiss their existing categorical beliefs about men and women in order to judge the heights fairly.

Some research findings are interesting as they help us to know that people have the tendency to view members of outside groups as being more homogenous than members of their own group. This is a phenomenon known as the out-group homogeneity bias. This perception that all members of an out-group are similar is applicable on all groups, whether based on race, nationality, religion, age, or other naturally occurring group affiliations. Such people have the tendency to exaggerate individual differences among members of their own groups, but they are conveniently willing to see those who belong to out-groups as being 'all the same'.

Measures to Overcome Prejudice

First of all, we have to analyze the cause of prejudice. Psychologists have also found various ways and means to reduce or even eliminate it. By imparting training to people so as to make more empathetic to members of other groups can yield the desired result. By putting oneself in the shoes of others, people can think about how they would respond and gain a greater understanding of other people's actions. Similarly, the government also can initiate some action to curb prejudice. It can pass laws and regulations ensuring fair and equal treatment to all groups of people. Public opinion can be mobilized by generating awareness against the use of prejudice. Anti-prejudice social norms can be put in place. People can be made aware of the inconsistencies in their own belief system by pointing out the loopholes in their belief. Normally, when people don't have the opportunity to interact with each other, they rely on hearsay or misinformation. But when the more opportunities of interaction are created, it can have a soothing effect on such people.

Prejudice & Discrimination

There is a marked difference between prejudice & discrimination. Prejudice and Discrimination are difficult to separate. They typically appear together. Prejudice is defined as a preconceived opinion while Discrimination is defined as Biased or unfavorable treatment. Discrimination converts the mental process of prejudice into action. It is widely accepted that discrimination is the action. When a person is prejudiced, he may not act on his attitude. Hence, someone may be prejudiced towards a certain group but not discriminate against them. As such, prejudice has all the

three components of an attitude viz. affective, behavioral and cognitive but discrimination just involves behavior.

Prejudice and discrimination can be explained as follows:

- Social identity Theory
- Authoritarian Personality
- Realistic Conflict Theory - Robbers Cave
- Stereotyping

To understand discrimination far better, some examples can be cited:

English men discriminated Indians on the basis of the race. They coined such kinds of sentences: Indians and dogs are not allowed on this Road. Similarly, white people practiced Apartheid.

Apartheid literally means "separateness". It was a system of racial segregation that was practiced in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. Non-white people were not entitled to vote and they had to live in separate communities. During the World War II, Jewish people were compelled to wear yellow stars to identify themselves as Jews in Germany and German-controlled lands. Later, the Jews were confined in concentration camps by the Nazis.

Racism can be defined as negative behaviour on an incorrect assumption that one race is inherently superior to others. This is one of the many forms of discrimination which is defined as unfair actions directed against people based on their race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, language, faith, or sexual orientation.

After the conclusion of the World War First, Germany was a shadow of its former self. Its economy was off the track. By the time Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933 there were six million unemployed workers in Germany. Germany was the victim of a depression. The Germans were angry. They hated the Allies for causing this to them. Hatred was growing in the minds of the Germans. It can be well imagined that Hitler knew this. When he could feel the pulse, this is also reasonable to think that he could direct his people anger and hatred inward. He projected Jews as enemy. By providing his people with a common enemy he could unify them behind him. His powerful propaganda tactics started to play their role. He lay blame on the Jews for Germany's defeat in World War I. He held them responsible for Germany's many social and economic problems. He cornered the ruling classes by accusing the Jews of being in league with the communists. German Jews were made to wear armbands with Stars of David on them. They were beaten in the streets by groups of antisocial elements. Jewish business men were targeted; they were forced to paint Stars of David on the doors, guards were placed at the doors in order to deter people from entering. Hitler even got his message to the children of Germany;

'Children at schools were taught specifically anti-Semitic ideas. Jewish school children were openly ridiculed by the German children. This is a clear-cut case of discrimination. There can be Discrimination on the basis of the Age as well. This is known as a type of discrimination against a person or group on the grounds of age. The Discrimination on the basis of Gender is also very much prevalent. In India daughters are valued less than sons. This is also an instance of discrimination that while women are often discriminated against in the workplace, men are often discriminated against at home and family environments in Western societies.

Sources of Prejudice and Discrimination

Discrimination had been prevalent among us since centuries. Both discrimination and prejudice would probably be among us until the Doomsday. Discrimination is an action that treats people unfairly because of their membership in a particular social group, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs to rather on that individual. It is an unjustified treatment to a person, racial group, and minority. It is such an action that is based on prejudice. There are various factors responsible for being a prejudiced person and a discriminator. Peers, parents and group membership play a major role for such things. Such people try to conform to the social norms and it amounts to the fact that they have to follow the people who adopt the normal set of behavior(s) associated with a particular group or society.

Social norms are associated with the behavior that is considered appropriate within a social group. They also play a very powerful role in prejudice and discrimination. It is possible that people may have prejudiced beliefs and feelings and act in a prejudiced way because they feel compelled to conform to what is regarded as normal in the social groups to which they belong:

Role of Social Norms on Prejudice

Minard carried out a research. He investigated the role of social norms in influencing prejudice and discrimination. He observed, both above and below ground, the behavior of black and white miners in a town in the southern United States. Based on his research he concluded that below ground, where the social norm was a friendly behavior towards work colleagues, 80 of the white miners were friendly towards the black miners. He found above ground, where the social norm was a prejudiced behavior by whites to blacks. This decreased to 20 in such cases. Similarly, a study was carried out by Rogers and Frantz on prejudice and discrimination. He concluded that immigrants to Rhodesia, now known as Zimbabwe, became more prejudiced when the longer they had been in the country. Gradually they conformed more to the cultural norm of prejudice being practiced against the black population.

Psychologists also agree that most of the people are aware about prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination and have experienced them in their life. Social psychologists try to distinguish among these terms by concentrating on whether they involve feelings (affect), cognition, or behaviors. We as individuals have the tendency to migrate toward those that may look, think or act like us but we may hate anyone who is different from us. This tendency may lead to less social interaction with those outside of our comfort zone.

People's negative stereotypes give rise to intolerance, thus resulting into being prejudiced. But negative emotions such as pity, envy, disgust and pride also may play a bigger role in being prejudiced and discriminatory. In fact, these emotions are attached not only to people's prejudicial ideas about social, cultural and religious 'out-groups' they don't belong to but they also belong to discriminatory behavior. This is a very important aspect. But this aspect is often overlooked about prejudice.

Conclusion

Normally we try to oversimplify the whole process of the worldly affairs. Resultantly we categorize people based on various factors. Sometimes there may be too much information to sort. This process may require too much effort to put it logically, methodically, and rationally. Normally we are tempted to quickly categorize information to interact and react. But sometimes such an action leads to errors as well. Prejudice, stereotyping are related to the category of the mental mistakes that arise from our tendency to quickly categorize information in the world around us. Discrimination is related to behavior. To make the world worth living awareness about these things has to be generated more and more and there lies the bright

future of the mankind or else the mankind is doomed.

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