

# Discrimination and prejudice

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



Discrimination is easiest explained through prejudice. Prejudice is when a social subject holds a preconceived notion about another person or a group of people, without judging from experience. Discrimination is when a social subject acts upon such preconceived notions. A common mistake is the concept that both prejudice and discrimination are only negative, as in a derogative notion of someone (such as the treatment many minorities were subjected to), but, in truth, positive discrimination and prejudice are both possible, if there is a preconceived notion in favor of someone.

Both of these notions are those of inequality, the difference between them being in thought as opposed to action of any kind. In fact, it's possible to be prejudiced and not discriminate, out of such things as fear or profit, and it is possible to discriminate for the same reasons and not be prejudiced. Though, most commonly, it is those who are biased who discriminate, and those who are non-biased give equal treatment to their peers from different groups.

There are three types of discrimination, based mostly on the level of social deepness. There is personal discrimination, which consists of any personal attack on a minority member, from slurs to murder. This is any attack on the personal level, any interaction of particular human beings. An instance of such an attack would be calling a transgendered human spawn of Satan. There is legal discrimination, which is when a minority group is denied any kind of rights – public institutions, jobs, housing and anything social, basically.

Any person who has ever been denied a job because “blacks do not work as well as whites do” (without looking at the prior credentials) knows what legal

discrimination is like. And, finally, the most deeply entrenched in society is institutional discrimination. This is when there is a tradition of discrimination so deep that it is no longer viewed as discrimination, where a discriminatory idea is so old and seemingly natural, that even members of the minority group themselves sometimes believe it.

A great example is that “ Romani are thieves”. Despite all cultural tradition, if this stereotype weren't upheld by society, building walls on their side of the Romani self-chose seclusion, their way of life might have changed over the centuries, like it did with many other peoples. There are four basic approaches to the matters of aging within society. The first is the functionalist approach, otherwise known as social disengagement theory.

It looks upon the withdrawal of elders from society as natural, since they gradually lose social power, and thus remove themselves from social responsibilities as to make room for youth in functional aspects, while retaining the ability to engage in activities of their choosing, such as hobbies, should they so desire. However, the activity (or interactionist) theory disputes the functionalist approach, by claiming that the more active an elderly person remains, the better their quality of life. They may disengage from responsibilities, but remaining active is necessary for a full life even in this age.

Research supports this, despite criticisms that this may set unrealistic goals for the elderly. Their capacity for activity does lessen, but activity remains a basic need for happiness, and needs to be fulfilled, even in this reduced amount. But if the elderly are happier if engaged in activities, why do they disengage? Conflict theory states that, since profit is the driving

force behind society, there is much pressure on the elderly to leave their positions, so that younger, less expensive and more competent specialists may be hired, the elderly losing social value as time goes on.

This seems more correct than the subculture approach, which states that the elderly, while disengaging with those younger, form subcultures among themselves to compensate. While subcultures may be formed, they are not the defining factor for the disengagement, but rather, one of its consequences. And last, the exchange theory on aging combines all of these perspectives, by stating that the elderly remain active socially (and thus, happy) as long as their activity is beneficial to all involved.

By “beneficial” they do not mean only economic benefits, but also the exchange of simple human feelings such as love, friendship and compassion, though some elderly people remain engaged economically (for instance, by renting rooms in their homes), and thus allow themselves the possibility of social interaction. This also includes the functionalist perspective, for it shows how rewards are given in return for past productivity. This is the most comprehensive approach.