

# Discrimination in contemporary british society sociology essay



Discrimination means treating someone differently because of something about them – their race, age or sex, for instance which is not relevant to the situation. It results in people being unfairly denied opportunities.

Discrimination can be positive or negative, direct or indirect, individual, institutional and structural. For example, where a person who is black fails to get a promotion because her boss holds prejudiced views about black people, a discriminatory act has occurred. The boss has acted upon his prejudice and has dealt less favourably towards the person as a result.

Oppression is linked to discrimination as it refers to the power to make an individual feel inferior. Oppression is the arbitrary and cruel exercise of power. While the term is usually used to describe wrongful acts of government, oppression is rarely limited solely to government action.

Oppression is most commonly felt and expressed by a widespread, if unconscious, assumption that a certain class of people are inferior.

Oppression is often used to mean a certain group is being kept down by unjust use of force or authority and has been referred to as 'systematic oppression'. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the concept of Human Rights in general were designed to eradicate oppression by giving a clear articulation of what limits should be placed on the power of any entity to control an individual or group of people. An example of oppression which is often applied to older people is to suggest that things should be done to them against their will, if it is not for their own good; this is discriminatory, patronising and illegal. People's choice should always be respected, unless there are very good reasons for doing otherwise.

Tolerance is essential if everyone is to have equal opportunities. It means that people recognise and respect the rights of others who are different. Prejudice prevents some people from doing this. A prejudice is a judgement made without evidence, and sometimes in the face of evidence to the contrary.

Prejudice results in discrimination. Therefore, prejudice against a certain group, black people for example, suggests prejudging members of that community before you know anything about them or have had any shared experiences with them.

It might not always be the case that you have absolutely no knowledge or experience of a particular person or group of people. You may know bits and pieces about them or may have even met one or two. However, prejudice often involves a process of filling in the gaps in your knowledge or experience, and this is where stereotyping comes in. Stereotyping is where you believe that just because people are members of a particular visible group, they must also share particular traits which you think are characteristic of that group. The reasons you may believe that they share those traits may be because this is what you have been told, or maybe it is what you have experienced. For example, if the first time you meet a disabled person he/she is a wheelchair user who appears heavily dependent upon the assistance of others, you may form the view that such dependence is a common characteristic shared by other members of the disabled community, even though you have no direct experience or knowledge that this is in fact the case.

Racism to some sociologists could be viewed as a system of group privilege. This is the case in the employment sector as one may argue that in contemporary Britain ethnic minorities face a dilemma that is seen in sociological terms as the "glass ceiling". That is that one may be able to rise up in his job sector to a certain level where it is not possible to move up higher the same way white colleagues or the majority are able to do so. A recent example of this would be Shabir Hussein's case where one may argue that he had gone through a glass ceiling situation that is that he feels that his boss is preventing him from the top post. This is due to his skin colour as his face did not fit, and "it did not fit because it was not white". Shabir Hussein is not the only case of a racial discrimination within the metropolitan police, rather there is also Tarique Ghaffur who is assistant commissioner of police and is seen to have suffered racial discrimination here again for his skin colour and was deferred four times from the top post due to the fact that he is brown. Another example of racial discrimination within the employment sector is the pay levels which figures may support as they show that during the pay rise of teachers it was clearly stated that depending on their skin colour they get a pay rise. In other words figures had shown that 95.8% of British white teachers were given the maximum pay rise in comparison to 87.79% and 80.2% Bangladeshi and African black of the same qualifications. This clearly states racial discrimination in employment as ethnic minorities are most likely to be paid less and seem to be inferior to whites of the same qualifications, skills and qualities.

A recent argument that I would like to touch upon is Mohammad Almajed's case. He is a foreign student who had come to Sussex to improve his English

but was murdered due to his colour. It could be argued that Mohammad is not in any way an immigrant as he had come to Britain for a short period. Due to the so called "unwitting racism", - which in sociological terms is known as colour-blind racism - that has been around for a while after the 7/7 bombings. One may suggest that this murder is unjust as Mohammad is not in Britain for the benefits or employment to assume that he is here to fill in the places of the majority ('whites') or increase the number of ethnic minorities. This case is relevant to the level of racism in Britain as it suggests that some members of society perform colour blind racism clearly as they perceive all coloured people, whether their black or brown are a risk to Britain. Another aspect I would like to touch upon in this matter is that the restaurant owner -where Mohammad had gone to diner at- had warned the police about the gang being suspicious but the police did not attempt to do anything and simply just moved on rather than stick around for a little longer to keep an eye out for the gang. One may argue that the police did not pay much attention to the matter due to the idea that they saw Mohammad coloured and didn't care much. However there is also the view that it is not the policies of the police that are racist but rather the officers themselves for personal reasons or beliefs as one does not want to perform unwitting racism assuming all the police forces are racist. There are also other examples of the murdering of innocent people due to their colour such as Stephan Lawrence and Jean Charles De Menezes who were also ether murdered by the police in the assumption that they are terrorists or by civilians due to hatred for the minorities.

## **Anti-discrimination legislation.**

The Employment and the Employment came into force on 1 and 2 December 2003 respectively. The two sets of Regulations outlaw direct and indirect discrimination against, and harassment and victimisation of, people in employment and vocational training because of their sexual orientation, religion or belief.

The Regulations are intended to implement key elements of the EU Directive (2000/78/EC) establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, adopted in November 2000 (EU0102295F), which outlaws discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability and age in employment and vocational training. In order to comply with the disability and age strands of the Directive, amendments to the Disability (TN0102201S) will come into force in October 2004 and new legislation will outlaw discrim The Regulations apply to all employers in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales). Legislation outlawing discrimination on grounds of religion or belief already exists in Northern Ireland (UK0308106T), and separate legislation on sexual orientation is being introduced in Northern Ireland. The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service has produced good practice guidance on implementing the Regulations on sexual and religion. Nation on the grounds of age by October 2006.

UK anti-discrimination law is currently made up of three main statutes dealing with sex, race and disability respectively:

- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA 1975) prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex and marital

Status in the fields of employment, education and provision of goods and services, and gender Reassignment only in the field of employment. It applies in England, Scotland and Wales.

- The Race Relations Act 1976 (RRA 1976) prohibits discrimination on grounds of race, colour,

Nationality, ethnic and national origin in the fields of employment, education and provision of goods and services. It applies in England, Scotland and Wales.

- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) deals with discrimination on grounds of disability

In employment, education, access to goods, facilities, services and premises. It applies in England,

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (in relation to employment).

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and the Disability

Rights Commission (DRC) are the agencies in charge of the monitoring and administrative enforcement

of the SDA 1975, RRA 1976 and the DDA 1995 respectively. They have an advisory and educative

## **Media and discrimination**

The Media is a unique feature of modern society; its development has accompanied an increase in the magnitude and complexity of societal actions and engagements, rapid social change, technological innovation, rising personal income and standard of life and the decline of some traditional forms of control and authority.

The professional practice of journalism is dictated by a number of tenets that drive narrow reporting of minorities. Operating under news values of timeliness, conflict, and impact, journalists and editors claim to approach ethnic issues with the same news sense as they do any issue (Loo, E 1993, pg 41). The resulting scenario, however, appears to be one where few positive stories involving ethnicity are deemed newsworthy. For example, little or no media coverage has been given to positive initiatives by the Muslim ethnic minority in UK to engage, understand, and placate disaffected youth in Britain. Conflict, on the other hand, is an obviously favoured news value. Sensationalist reports of riots and crime evoke outrage, emotion, and above all, increased newspaper circulations. The media tends to cover ethnic issues only when it impacts mainstream society, resulting in ethnic new-stories being pre-framed in an adversarial ‘Us verses Them’ manner. A story is something that is important to readers, to the population, to the dominant culture. An issue is important to readers only if it is something they would naturally wish to discuss. Positive examples of ethnic integration, or socio-economic analyses of the living conditions of Islamic Britain, do not appear to qualify as issues that mainstream readers wish to be presented.



Through the events of September 11, the ' 7-7 bombing' and the general Terrorist debacle, many minority ethnic groups have been discriminated against with varying xenophobic-orientated commentary pervading the media. Such examples can be found with innocent Muslims being treated poorly in the wake of horrific terrorist activity. " The hate-graffiti appeared just after the store began running advertisements on local television that featured a Muslim woman wearing an Islamic head scarf. Hate-attacks were evident across the globe after the media portrayed a few Muslim extremists being to blame for some terrorist pursuits. The media is the device through which cultural identity's of minorities can be formed and displayed.

Through the numerous differing languages of minorities, especially in conjunction with ethnic minorities, the media often fail to reaffirm the targeted audience with acceptance for the maintenance of these languages. Newspaper gossip, radio hypocrisy and television's carrying agendas seek to downplay the right for language maintenance within the numerous minority groups. Statements such as: " Creole was just a " bastardized" version of French." or " Chinese is the language for " Ching-Chong Chinamen" not white Anglo-Saxons." provide the public with thoughts that only allow for the discrimination of such languages. People cannot be forced to contain pluralist ideology, when the very grounding for their social structure is warped by the blatant portrayals of the media.