

Bias, Discrimination, and the Importance of Cultural Sensitivity

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This paper describes bias and discrimination that play a role in the lives of those viewed with differences based on color, ethnicity, gender, language, appearance, age, religion, sexual orientation, or country of origin. Bias and discrimination play a major role in difficulties faced by unserved and underserved populations such as migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and others (Grech, 2019; Gönültas & Mulvey, 2019; International Organization for Migration, 2018). Bias is a prejudicial view of others, based on differences viewed in a negative manner (Greene, 2013). Greene describes this bias as a form of tribalism, favoring of in-group members over out-group members. Bias can lead to the active factor of discrimination that impacts the lives of individuals or of a population (Ziersch, Due, & Walsh, 2020). Discrimination involves prejudicial treatment and the threat of real or potential danger (American Psychological Association, 2018; Baddar, 2018; Human Rights Campaign, 2018). In summary, bias is a prejudicial view of others, while discrimination involves the prejudicial treatment of others.

Bias and Discrimination

Bias is defined as an individual's opinion or point of view that is reflected in a hostile, antagonistic, and prejudicial attitude toward differences and diversity (Arrocha, 2019; Cloke, 2012). Bias is exhibited in an attitude toward others who are viewed as *different* and thought of in a negative manner (FitzGerald, Martin, Berner, & Hurst, 2019). Research has shown that individuals hold a greater number of negative attitudes toward racial or ethnic differences

(Daumeyer, Onyeador, Brown & Richeson, 2019). Bias and discrimination can be expressed in racism (prejudice, discrimination, or aggression based on an individual's color), sexism (prejudice or discrimination, typically against women), homophobia (bias against lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individuals), the language or dialect spoken, and other prejudices associated with perceived differences. Discrimination can affect individuals' economic status and other aspects of their well-being (United Nations, 2018), along with the possibility of the internalization of the prejudice they experience.

Explicit Bias and Implicit Bias

There are two types of bias (Daumeyer et al., 2019). The first is explicit bias, with a conscious awareness of feelings or attitudes toward others. The second is implicit bias, with the absence of conscious feelings of bias toward others. Implicit bias is the unconscious attribution of particular qualities to a member of a certain culture or ethnic group. Implicit bias can be based on an individual's ethnicity, age, or appearance. One example of implicit bias may appear in the varying treatment of different patients by the same physician (Gonzalez, Kim, & Marantz, 2014). Implicit bias can lead to differences in the care of patients based on unintentional, unconscious assumptions by the health provider.

In occupational contexts, there may be unconscious bias against working with a certain gender. Many women report that they are treated differently than men in offices, college departments, or other contexts. Implicit bias can also have an effect on an individual's self-perception. For example, girls have been shown to possess the unconscious belief that females have a preference for studying an academic subject other than science or math (Cherry, 2019). This unconscious belief may play a role in females not pursuing science, technology,

engineering, or mathematics (STEM) studies or careers. In fact, women make up only 28% of the science, technology, engineering, and math workforces (American Association of University Women, 2020). Global statistics show that less than 30% of the world's science researchers are women, only 3% of female students enroll in communication technology courses, 5% of female students enroll in mathematics and statistic courses, and 8% female students enroll in engineering, manufacturing, and construction courses (Wood, 2020).

Xenophobia and Afrophobia

The origin of Xenophobia is found in the ancient Greek words *xenos* (stranger) and *phobos* (fear) (Miriam Webster, 2020). Xenophobia can be broadly defined as intense dislike, hatred, or fear of those perceived to be strangers (Master & Roby, 2000). Xenophobia may include verbal aggression that targets individuals who appear to be different to the native population (Pontiki, Gavriilidou, Gkoumas, & Piperidis, 2020). Xenophobia has been expressed toward migrants, refugees, and individuals with diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds. For example, migrant women and children were exposed to verbal attacks that told them to "Go back home" and for them to be deported (Arrocha, 2019). The analysis of Greek Twitter attacks found that targets consisted of various ethnicities that included immigrants (Pontiki et al.).

Afrophobia is a term applied to individuals of African descent with skin color other than white (European Network Against Racism, 2015). Afrophobia has been expressed through dislike, bias, bigotry, prejudice, oppression, racism, structural and institutional discrimination, racial and ethnic profiling, enslavement, xenophobia, societal marginalization and exclusion, violence, hate speech, and hate crimes directed against people of with dark skin colors. Nwabuzo (2015) reports a decline in public and political support for anti-racism, linked to anti-migrant

sentiment and rhetoric that is anti-migrant rhetoric, racist, and Islamophobic directed at Black and Muslim migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

The Language of Bias and Discrimination

Biased language is expressed in comments that express negative stereotypes or prejudices about others on the basis of color, gender, or ethnicity. These comments are likely to have an impact on the thoughts and feelings of others. Bias comments convey prejudice toward those who have differences from those who make these remarks (Nordquist, 2019). Nordquist notes that older encyclopedia editions referred to “devout Catholics” and “fanatical Muslims.” This biased term used to describe Muslims no longer appears in current encyclopedia editions.

The varied languages and dialects spoken by others are positive and provide rich contributions to other cultures. However, there are some who view any differences as negative. Bias toward a language spoken by migrants was reflected in a comment regarding the family’s native language that was used when speaking to their child (Levey, Cheng, & Langdon, 2013, p. 88).

I heard you speaking Spanish when you were talking to your child. If you want your children to speak English, you must stop speaking Spanish when you talk to them.

This speaker did not seem aware of the bias expressed in this comment, nor the negative effect on the child’s parents. In addition, the speaker did not seem aware of the positive aspects of bilingualism and the use of the native language that allows a family to convey their cultural and historical knowledge to their children.

Microaggression

Microaggression involves comments that convey bias toward minority individuals or groups. Microaggressions consist of verbal or nonverbal slights or insults that communicate hostility or negative messages (Sue, 2010). Examples of microaggression statements that convey the idea that an individual is not a member of the dominant group (e.g., “Where are you from?” or “You speak good English”). Another example is telling an individual who speaks another language or dialect that he or she is well spoken.

Another type of microaggression consists of interrupting a speaker (Premack, 2018). This conveys the impression that the comment being expressed lacks validity or value.

Microaggression involves assigning a characteristic to a group based on a stereotypical view, often having the appearance of praise (e.g., “You people always do so well in classes”). Other examples consist of telling someone “You don’t look transgender/gay/Jewish). An example of microaggression racism is “You are a credit to your race” (University of Minnesota School of Public Health, 2019). These messages can be either intentional or unintentional. In either case, these comments cause harm to others (Tyner, 2019). In summary, bias exists across all domains and frequently leads to negative feelings, demoralization, or a feeling of inferiority.

Racial Bias

Racism is based on the perception of putative differences in physical abilities, intelligence, and level of civilization (King, 2019). Racism affects any group that is defined or perceived as different. For example, Italian immigrants came to the United States in the state of Louisiana after the Civil War (Staples, 2019). These immigrants were welcomed, given that former slaves were leaving to seek better lives and jobs. These immigrants lived together in Italian neighborhoods, spoke their native language, developed businesses, and socialized with and wed

African Americans. Racism affected these immigrants in the same manner as African Americans. Darker skinned Italians were shut out of schools, movie houses, labor unions, and were described in racist terms. They were also treated in the same manner as African Americans through lynching.

Racial bias has also been expressed toward a mixed race population referred to as Mestizos/Mestizas (De Castro, 2010). This term was derived from the Latin term *mixtus* (mixed). These terms were used as a racial category in Latin America to describe individuals with mixed ethnic ancestry (i.e., Native American-European, Native-French, Native-Portuguese or Native-Dutch mixed ancestry). Bias was based on the belief that racial mixing was a degenerative process. In Ecuador, policies have been developed to confront the bias and discrimination faced by the mixed-race populations that have had an effect on inequalities in education and other social factors (Roitman & Oviedo, 2017).

Research, involving a complete genome from different parts of the world, has revealed no fundamental genetic differences between Africans and Europeans (Gannon, 2016). Genetic research that examined samples from people who self-identified as members of different races found no scientific evidence to support the concept of race (McCann-Mortimer, Augoustinos, & Lecouteur, 2004). Differences are based on environmental factors. For example, skin and eye color are controlled by relatively few genes that allow changes in response to environmental conditions.

Melanin and Color

Melanin is a complex biological pigment present in skin, hair, eyes, ears, and the nervous system (ElObeid, Kamal-Eldin, Abdelhalim, & Haseeb, 2017). Differences in skin color resulted from

evolution in response to environmental factors, with high ultra violet radiation resulting in dark skin color and low ultra violet radiation leading to light skin color (Yadufashije & Samuel, 2019). Melanin has two forms: pheomelanin (yellow-reddish), accumulated in light complexion people, and eumelanin (black brown), produced in dark complexion people. Skin color is correlated with latitude and the distribution of ultraviolet radiation (Deng & Xu, 2018).

Equatorial populations have evolved to possess dark skin as protection against ultraviolet radiation. The long process of evolutionary adaptation has generated the current geographic distribution of skin color. As a result, populations closer to the equator tend to have dark skin for protection against ultraviolet radiation, while populations who are at higher latitudes tend to have lighter skin. Countries closer to the equator are Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Sao Tome & Principe, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, and Indonesia. Some countries that are not closer to the equator are Canada, Greenland, Russia, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Alaska (USA), and Iceland. In spite of skin color differences, genetic research has revealed that all humans are closely related, with the same collection of genes with slightly different versions (Kolbert, 2018). Thus, race can be viewed as a sociohistorical construct. Given that Homo sapiens evolved in Africa, we are all essentially Africans.

Bias and Discrimination toward Religion, Ethnicity, and Indigenous Populations

Religion refers to human beliefs and practices which are regarded as holy, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, or worthy of especial reverence. Ethnicity refers to the culture of individuals from a particular geographic region or descendants of those from a particular region (Nittle, 2019). The meaning of ethnicity includes individuals' language, religion, dress, culture, and customs. Indigenous populations are those that are native to a particular region. These

populations possess traditions and social, cultural, economic, and political beliefs that are distinct from those of the dominant society in which they live (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2020).

Bias against religious beliefs is frequently influenced by individuals' minority status in a country or a political stance against a particular religious group (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2018). Religious bias has affected many minority populations across the world (Human Rights Watch, 2020). For example, religious bias in Algeria affects the Ahmadiyya community and non-Muslims. Mosques have been closed in Angola. Religious freedom is restricted in Tibet and bias affects Christians and Non-Sunni Muslims in Egypt. Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics, Muslims, and Lutherans face bias in Equatorial Guinea and in Eritrea. Muslims and Dalits (formerly Untouchables) face bias in India and all religious minorities face bias in Indonesia. Religious minorities face bias in Indonesia and Iran treats the Bahá'ís population with bias. Religious bias exists in Nepal for ethnic minorities and lower Castes. Minorities, such as Ahmadis, encounter bias in Pakistan,. Minority religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Islamic groups, meet bias in Russia. In Saudi Arabia, religious minorities face bias, such as Twelver Shia and Ismailis are met with bias. Jehovah's Witnesses suffer bias in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. In Vietnam, the Cao Dai, Christian, and Buddhist religions are confronted with bias.

A 2018 survey of 1,200 individuals of South Asian descent in the United States found that 26 percent reported physical assault and 59 percent reported offensive jokes or remarks directed at them because of their caste (Ray, 2019). Religious bias and discrimination have affected followers of the Muslim religion, with anti-Muslim rhetoric associated with extremism and terrorism (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2019a). The most

commonly reported hate crimes have consisted of attacks against mosques and women wearing headscarves, along with inappropriate debris being left outside of Muslim homes. Anti-Semitism has long been a political ideology (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2019b) based on the myth that Jews are associated with both capitalism and communism, while controlling the world. Present-day anti-Semitism also includes denial that the Holocaust ever occurred.

Ethnic bias and discrimination was reported by Human Rights Watch (2020). It was reported that ethnic bias and violence has affected those in the Beni territory and Notre Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Ethnic and religious bias has affected Uyghur and Turkic populations in China. Roma children have limited service access in Bosnia, Turkey, and other countries. There is a ban on wearing niqabs and burkas in the Netherlands, signaling bias toward the Muslim population. Black and North African migrants face discrimination in the Calais region in France, with antisemitism expressed toward Jews. Refugees and asylum seekers face attacks by far-right groups in Germany.

Conditions faced by indigenous populations were reported by Human Rights Watch (2020). For example, the Ainu in Japan are faced with bias, discrimination, and the loss of human rights. The indigenous Waorani and Kichwa people report not being consulted in the exploitation of their ancestral lands in Ecuador. In Argentina, indigenous people are met with difficulties accessing justice, education, health care, and other basic services. Many times, these populations are viewed with bias because of color.

Gender and Discrimination

Gender can be described in terms of sexual orientation (attraction to others), gender identity (concept of self as male, female, or both), gender expression (external appearance based on clothing that designates identity as masculine or feminine), and transgender (gender identity different from sex assigned at birth) (Human Rights Campaign, 2020). LGBTQ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning. Lesbian refers to a woman with sexual orientation toward women, gay refers to men attracted to men, bisexual refers to attraction to more than one gender, and queer refers to lack of conformation to cultural norms regarding sexuality, and questioning refers to an individual unsure of gender identity (Vanderbilt University, 2020). These terms describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Many times, LGBTQ people are exposed to sexism and prejudice that takes the form of bias, discrimination, or violence. In 2017, it was reported that many hate crimes were based on sexual orientation and gender identity bias, resulting in the death of 29 transgender individuals mainly consisting of transgender women of color (Human Rights Campaign, 2018). Human Rights Watch (2020) examined reports of hate crimes that occurred between 2018 and 2019 in places or countries across the world. For example, at least 26 LGBTQ people had been killed and a transgender woman brutally slain in Honduras. This illustrates the connection between racism, sexism, and transphobia (bias toward transsexual or transgender individuals). There are groups that advocate hate and discrimination in Russia that place ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people at risk. A transgender woman was beaten to death in El Salvador. Her killers were caught and charged with aggravated homicide. In addition, a new law was established in 2020 in El Salvador to protect the health and safeguard the rights of internally displaced people, given the displacement of thousands due to organized crime and violence (Lancet Migration, 2020). There are also reports of beatings and torture of men perceived to be

gay in Uzbekistan. Several reviews have found that sexual and gender minorities are more likely to be affected by physical violence than the general population (Blondeel, de Vasconcelos, Garcia-Moreno, Stephenson, Temmerman, & Toskin, 2018, p. 29). Vulnerable populations are migrants and refugees who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (Forced Migration Review, 2013).

Another form of bias is expressed in misogynist slurs. These are comments that convey a prejudicial view of women, made with the goal of insulting or causing damage to a woman's reputation. Misogynist slurs are used thousands of times a day on social media (Levey, 2018, p. 153), frequently suggesting potential sexual violence against women who are targeted (Citron, 2016). Trolling (provocative or offensive comments) and publishing personal information has led some women to reduce activity on social media, cease online activity, cancel public appearances, and change their physical address. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015) has identified the use of social media as a global problem that enables violence against women and girls (VAWG) (Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, 2015). The UN reports that millions of women and girls around the world are subjected, in a deliberate manner, to social media misogynist slurs that cut across borders, race, culture, and income groups. The UN sustainable development goals include establishing an internet that eliminates violence against women and girls.

Gender Discrimination across the Globe

There are countries that have prohibited discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Angola, Argentina, and Ecuador have enacted laws that prohibit discrimination against sexual orientation and gender identity. In Mexico, 18 states

have declared same-sex marriage legal. In Peru, there has been a movement to exclude the concept of gender from public policy. In addition, a judge ordered the recognition of the same-sex marriage of a Peruvian couple wed in the United States. In the United States, the Pentagon lifted the ban on transgender people openly serving in the military in 2016.

In contrast, there are countries and places across the world that have not enacted laws that prohibit discrimination. Within certain countries, LGBT individuals are exposed to harassment, violence, imprisonment, and laws that impose the death penalty. Human Rights Watch (2020) provides research on human rights practices around the globe, with a summary of key issues and events from late 2018 through November 2019. The Human Rights Watch research shows that the countries and places that have not prohibited discrimination against gender differences are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Brazil Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Egypt, Eswatini, France, Georgia, Guinea, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uganda, Ukraine, United States, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe. In some of these countries and locations, LGBTQ individuals suffer harassment and violence. In others, they face imprisonment or a death penalty.

Discrimination and Hate Crimes

There are times with bias and discriminations take a violent form. A hate crime is a criminal offence committed against a person or property that is motivated by hostility based on any aspect of an individual's identity, such as disability, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, faith or belief, or sexual orientation. Hate crimes are an extreme form of prejudice, motivated by hate,

fear, ignorance, or anger that may result from political discourse or fear that a particular group is a threat to the livelihood or way of life of another group (American Psychological Association, 2018). This leads to aggression against targeted population.

Bias and hatred of differences have motivated hate crimes throughout history. In 1921, there was a major attack on an African American community in Tulsa, Oklahoma (History, 2019). This attack was termed the Tulsa massacre, taking place when a white mob attacked residents of a predominately African American community. Hundreds were killed and thousands lost their homes after homes and businesses were burned. Racial hate crimes have also targeted Jews. Between 1941 and 1945, six million Jews were murdered in German occupied countries in Europe. Recent religious hate crimes have consisted of arson, graffiti on synagogues, assaults on persons wearing religious garments, the desecration of graves, and murder. Hate crimes directed at Muslims decreased in 2017 but remained above historical averages (Baddar, 2018). Religious bias has led to murderous attacks across the globe, such as the shooting at a mosque in New Zealand (Herrera, 2019).

Hate crimes have been motivated by bias against individuals based on color (anti-black), gender or sexual orientation (anti-lesbian, anti-gay, and anti-transgender), religion (anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim), and ethnicity (national origin) (New York City Police Department, 2019). Hate crimes have taken place across the globe. Between 2013 and 2014, there were 44,480 hate crimes recorded by police in England and Wales, with 37,484 recorded as racial hate crimes and 2,273 recorded as religious hate crimes (Institute of Race Relations, 2020). Hate crimes are motivated by hostility or prejudice toward a person's perceived color, race, or national origin.

Hate crimes have also targeted religious beliefs, with crimes committed on the basis of religious identity having surged 23 percent in 2017 in the United States (Harvard Divinity

School, 2019). Forty-nine Muslim worshippers were killed at two mosques in New Zealand, two killed in New York, three wounded in Switzerland, six killed in Canada, along with the desecration and bombing of mosques in Spain (Aljazeera News, 2019). These attitudes lead to dehumanization with the perception that individuals or populations lack human qualities, characteristics, or features. Hate crimes have also targeted gender differences. There have been 18 transgender people killed this year in the United States, mostly transgender women of color (Rojas & Swales, 2019). This has led to a greater fear of travel to and from home, work, or school. In summary, hate crimes are committed against those viewed as different based on gender, religion, color, or other features that are viewed with prejudice, anger, fear, or hostility.

The Importance of Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity, cultural competence, and cultural humility are factors required to address bias and discrimination (Stubbe, 2020). Cultural sensitivity is a factor that plays a positive role in interaction with individuals who differ from the speaker in terms ethnicity, gender, culture, or other factors. Cultural sensitivity provides an individual with empathy and an understanding of the feelings of others. There are three types of empathy: Cognitive, emotional or affective, and compassionate empathy (Bariso, 2018). Cognitive empathy involves understanding an individual's feelings and thoughts. Emotional or affective empathy involves the ability to respond to others' feelings or emotions. Compassionate empathy allows us to act on the basis of the feelings of others.

Cultural competence focuses on the ability to interact effectively with individuals from different cultures. Cultural humility involves the process of self-reflection and self-criticism that addresses differences and inequities between individuals in social and communicative

interaction. In this interaction, cultural humility involves respect for another's beliefs, customs, and values. The self-reflection and self-criticism allows one to learn from others.

Conclusions

Bias is defined as a hostile and prejudicial attitude toward those who exhibit differences.

Discrimination is the potential outcome of bias, involving prejudicial treatment of those viewed as exhibiting differences. Bias is based on a variety of perceived differences, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, language or dialect spoken, and any other difference viewed in a negative manner. Explicit bias is the conscious awareness and possible expression of prejudice, while implicit bias is the lack of awareness of prejudicial thoughts or feelings. While there are differences, both play a role in attitudes and behavior.

One of the major areas of bias involve prejudice toward those who differ in appearance. Genetic research has examined individuals who have identified themselves as members of different races. Findings showed no scientific evidence of systematic or fundamental genetic differences among those who differ in skin color. These findings add support to the view that race is a historical social construct. Perceived differences are based on evolution in response to differing environmental factors, such as the reaction to energy emitted by ultraviolet radiation from the sun. Equatorial populations evolved dark skin as protection against ultraviolet radiation, while northern populations evolved pale skin that allowed production of vitamin D from lower exposure to the sun. In summary, there is no support for the concept of racial differences, given we all evolved from somewhere in Africa.

While bias and discrimination have been presented as a set of ideas, there are times when bias takes an aggressive form. There have been attacks against people of color, those who exhibit

gender differences, those who hold a minority religious belief, and on places of worship. These aggressive acts have taken place on a global scale, often fueled by messages of hate expressed by political leaders and media. Dehumanization is the outcome of these attacks, causing the loss of a positive perception of self. Cultural sensitivity is an important factor that allows positive interaction and treatment of those who differ in ethnicity, gender, culture, or in other ways that constitute *differences*. Empathy toward others is an essential characteristic of cultural sensitivity, a factor that allows understanding of the thoughts and feelings of others. Cultural sensitivity, cultural competence, and cultural humility are essential skills to instill in children, students, friends, coworkers, and others. Cultural competence provides the ability to interact effectively with individuals from different cultures and cultural humility involves a process of self-reflection and self-criticism. These are concepts that are essential to provide an environment that assures all feel safe and respected. Microaggression, based on conscious or unconscious bias toward others, is a negative factor that affects others viewed as different.

The main targets of these attacks are migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and those who lack the wealth of those around them.

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