D 1.1 Prejudice, discrimination and racism

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# Prejudice

In social psychology, prejudices are regarded as stable, negative attitudes towards groups or persons belonging to those groups. A value-judgement i.e. emotional component is what distinguishes a prejudice from a stereotype. Stereotypes are considered the cognitive aspect of prejudice (cf. Hormel 2007, 39f).

Prejudices have a normative and moral element. Aspects of "social undesirability" are expressed in negative prejudices. In other words, prejudices are social judgements (cf. Bergmann 2006). Prejudices and stereotypes are usually not based on personal experience but are instead adopted from other people. They are not individual; they are shared and disseminated within a group. (Intergroup) prejudices also support a positive self-image: Part of claiming that Muslim men are *misogynistic* is showing oneself or the men of one's own group *not* to be misogynistic.

## Functions of prejudices[[1]](#footnote-1)

Prejudices take on different functions for individuals and groups that complement or are connected to each other. At an individual level, prejudices help you to find your bearings in the social world by dividing people into categories. This classification reduces complexity. Categorisation is the cognitive function of prejudices. At an emotional level, prejudices enable you to resolve inner emotional conflicts.

The categorisation underlying prejudices is not "objective", but is instead shaped by interests and usually favours the group to which you feel you belong. Prejudices cause the following problems in our judgement of others:

* One person's evaluation of others is systematically distorted by their assignment to specific groups.
* We consider members of our own group in a more nuanced way than members of other groups.
* This lack of nuance leads not just to a more stereotypical but also a more extreme – either positive or negative – judgement of members of other groups.
* Distorted, negative judgements of the other group are also reinforced by the fact that the behaviour of their members is ascribed to internal predispositions rather than external factors.
* Prejudice works through comparisons between groups, with each group using its positive self-image as a yardstick for evaluation.

An attempt to resolve emotional conflicts through prejudices is also problematic. Two mechanisms are at play here. On the one hand, prejudices redirect negative feelings and aggression towards people or groups whose powerlessness means they are unlikely to offer resistance or punishment. It is precisely this aspect – and not other specific features – that make weak minorities the preferred and interchangeable victims (scapegoat theory). On the other hand, prejudices can at a psychological level help us to reject characteristics and impulses in other people that we cannot accept in ourselves.

No one is free from prejudice. However, studies have shown that education has an important influence on xenophobic attitudes. Broad knowledge, but also and above all intellectual flexibility and a willingness to engage with new experiences, to process criticism and to examine situations from other perspectives, are linked to a lower tendency to form prejudices.

Prejudices have an integrating effect within groups. Negative judgements of other groups strengthen cohesion and increase internal homogeneity. They mask internal tensions and thus facilitate internal decision-making processes. Relations of friendship increase motivation to work for the group and facilitate the learning of group norms. However, the cost of this inner integrating function is a distorted view of other groups; an increased willingness to engage in conflict – as foreign groups are seen as potentially threatening – and a limited ability to change, as you isolate yourself from outside influences.

##### As a rule, social conflicts and fears between groups are held responsible for the emergence and mobilisation of prejudices. It is therefore assumed that competitive situations promote negative perceptions, feelings and behaviour towards another group, whilst prejudice and rivalry disappear in situations of cooperation. Fears also play a key role here. People can feel different types of threat:

* A real threat to the economic or social situation of a person's own group. The development of prejudice depends more on the feeling that your own group is worse off and less on a feeling of personal disadvantage.
* Symbolic threats arising from perceived differences in the culture, values and lifestyles of the other group (such as the fear of "Islam" today).
* Feelings of personal threat when in contact with members of other groups about which there are negative stereotypes (fear of crime).

Studies by social psychologist Henri Tajfel have, however, shown that it does not take external competition, conflicts of interest or fear to mobilise prejudices or discriminatory behaviour; in fact, all that is needed is social categorisation as a "group" for whatever reason. If that social categorisation is accepted and people are therefore identified as belonging to your own group or to the other group, discriminatory behaviour sets in (cf. Hormel 2007, 46f). This observation is highly relevant in education practice in particular (cf. Basic knowledge: Prejudice and discrimination in an education context).

## The development of prejudices[[2]](#footnote-2)

Prejudices develop in childhood. Children notice and see exactly how their environment reacts to differences. They learn how differences are viewed through both clear and hidden messages. Such messages come from a wide range of places and sources: family and friends, play parks, shopping centres, media and advertising, nursery and school. Children learn from their environment who is important and who is not, who has a say in society and who is voiceless, and ultimately also who is treated unkindly or disrespectfully. In addition to family and the media, a child's educational institution is a key learning arena (cf. Basic knowledge: Prejudice and discrimination at educational institutions and Basic knowledge: Anti-bias education).

# Prejudice and discrimination

##### Discrimination is behaviour that is based on differentiation and involves unfavourable and degrading or dismissive treatment of groups or individuals seen as belonging to a particular group. Prejudices are used to legitimise discrimination (Hormel 2007, 55). In legal terms, discrimination means unfavourable treatment on grounds such as sex, colour, ethnic or social background, age, disability, language, religion, world view, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, sexual orientation, property, birth or genetic features (cf. Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union).

Discriminatory behaviour is strongly influenced by context, and the following questions are relevant here:

* Is discriminatory behaviour endorsed or even required by those present, by the institution or by society?
* Is discriminatory behaviour sanctioned?
* Is there a reflection on prejudices as a precondition for or result of discriminatory behaviour?

# Racism and discrimination

One useful definition of racism for an education context comes from Aktion Kritischer Schüler:

Rassismus ist eine Ideologie, die dazu dient, bestimmte Macht- und Ausbeutungsverhältnisse zu legitimieren. Da diese historischen Änderungen und Entwicklungen unterworfen sind, gibt es auch nicht den Rassismus an sich, sondern verschiedene Rassismen, abhängig von den historischen Rahmenbedingungen. Wichtig zum Verständnis des Phänomens Rassismus ist, dass es sich bei „Rasse“ oder ähnlichem, neuerdings an die Stelle des alten Begriffes getretenen Termini, wie Kulturkreis etc., um Konstrukte handelt. Die Wissenschaft nennt den Prozess, der Menschen an Hand von Stereotypen zu einer Gruppe zusammenfasst und abwertet „Rassierung“ (racialising).
[Racism is an ideology that serves to legitimise certain relations of power and exploitation. As those relations are subject to historical changes and developments, there is no one racism but rather different racisms that change with the historical context. To understand the phenomenon of racism, it is important to realise that "race" or similar terms that have recently replaced it, such as cultural group, etc. are constructs. Researchers in the field call the process of grouping people on the basis of stereotypes "racialising".] (Aktion Kritischer Schüler 2012, 8)

This definition talks of racisms in the plural, making it clear that racism changes over time and every era has "its" form of racism. Critical scholars are now observing that racist lines of argument and decisions are being legitimised with the term "culture". Paul Mecheril sums up the views of many when he writes:

*Seit den 1980er-Jahren ist zu beobachten, dass in Diskursen über Einwanderung und Flucht immer häufiger das Wort ,Kultur´ und immer weniger das Wort ,Rasse´ gebraucht wird (Leiprecht 2001, 28). ,Kultur´ ist in vielen Texten zum Äquivalent für ,Rasse´ geworden; Kultur ist wie Rudolf Leiprecht schreibt ein ,Sprachversteck für Rasse` (Leiprecht 2001, 28). In Anlehnung an Etienne Balibar ist der Vorgang, dass Gruppen definiert, ihnen eine bestimmte ,Kultur` zugeschrieben und eine Hierarchisierung der ,Kulturen´ vorgenommen wird, als ,Kultur-Rassismus´ zu bezeichnen (Balibar 1990, 34). Das Problem, dass ,Kultur´ ein Sprachversteck für Rassenkonstruktionen darstellt, wird von der Interkulturellen Pädagogik selten benannt, kaum bearbeitet und dadurch nicht nur nicht aufgeklärt, sondern auch verdeckt.*
[Since the 1980s, we can see the word 'culture' being used increasingly frequently and the word 'race' being use less and less in discourses on immigration and flight (Leiprecht 2001, 28). 'Culture' has in many texts become the equivalent for 'race'; culture is, as Rudolf Leiprecht writes, a 'linguistic cover' for race (Leiprecht 2001, 28). According to Etienne Balibar, the process of defining groups, attributing them a certain 'culture' and creating a hierarchy of those 'cultures' is to be termed 'cultural racism' (Balibar 1990, 34). The problem that 'culture' is a linguistic cover for racial constructs is rarely mentioned in intercultural education studies; there is hardly any engagement with the issue and it is therefore not only not addressed but also concealed.] (Mecheril 2010, 66)

This perspective challenges us, whenever there is talk of "culture", to question whether the distinction is actually helpful in a given situation or whether it in fact hides something: either what the situation is actually about – for example a conflict of interest – or the actual purpose of the categorisation – for example discrimination.

The association ZARA – Zivilcourage & Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit defines racial discrimination as follows:

*Rassistische Diskriminierung ist, wenn Einzelpersonen und/oder eine Gruppe aufgrund der Hautfarbe, der Sprache, des Aussehens, der Religionszugehörigkeit, der Staatsbürgerschaft oder der Herkunft in irgendeiner Form benachteiligt werden.*
[Racial discrimination is when individuals and/or a group are disadvantaged in any way on the grounds of skin colour, language, appearance, religious affiliation, nationality or origin.] (ZARA 2018, 75)

ZARA has been documenting racial discrimination, counselling and advising victims and running training courses since 1999. Since 2017, ZARA has been increasingly involved in fighting hate on the Internet.

# Bibliography and suggested reading

Aktion Kritischer Schüler\_innen (2012), *Antirassismus Broschüre. Für eine Angstfreie Schule,* Wien: AKS. <https://issuu.com/aktionkritischerschuelerinnen/docs/antirassismusbroschuere/8> (15 September 2017)

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Gomolla, Mechtild/Fank-Olaf Radtke (2007), *Institutionelle Diskriminierung. Die Herstellung ethnischer Differenz in der Schule,* Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwiss.

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Hormel, Ulrike (2007), *Diskriminierung in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft. Begründungsprobleme pädagogischer Strategien und Konzepte*, Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Krause, Anke (2018), Wie Kinder hierarchisierte Annahmen über sich und andere entwickeln, in: Institut für den Situationsansatz/Fachstelle Kinderwelten (Hrsg.), *Inklusion in der Fortbildungspraxis. Lernprozesse zur Vorurteilsbewussten Bildung und Erziehung begleiten. Ein Methodenhandbuch, Berlin: Wamiki,* 21-25.

Mecheril, Paul (2010), Die Ordnung des erziehungswissenschaftlichen Diskurses in der Migrationsgesellschaft, in: ders. u.a., *Migrationspädagogik*, Weinheim und Basel: Beltz Verlag.

ZARA. Zivilcourage und Anti-Rassismus-Arbeit (2018), *Rassismus Report 2018*. <https://www.zara.or.at/de/wissen/publikationen/rassismusreport>

## Useful websites

**Stelle für Bekämpfung von Diskriminierung, City of Vienna**

<https://www.wien.gv.at/verwaltung/antidiskriminierung/>

**Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights**

<https://bim.lbg.ac.at/en/themen/asylum-anti-discrimination-and-diversity>

**SOS-Mitmensch** provides an overview of activities in Austria

<https://www.sosmitmensch.at/site/momagazin/alleausgaben/7/article/395.html>

**Workshops and training courses for schools**

ZARA training course: <https://www.zara.or.at/de/training>

**Courses for adults**

Österreichische Gesellschaft für Politische Bildung: <https://www.politischebildung.at/>

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT

1. Based on Bergmann (2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. cf. Krause (2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)