Racial/Ethnic Prejudice & Discrimination: Crash Course Sociology #35

Crash Course: Sociology
https://youtube.com/watch?v=gSddUPkVD24
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I think you'll all agree with me that racism is a loaded topic. What is or isn't racist or who is or isn't racist is one of the most hotly debated issues in American society.

Is racism about what you believe or is it about how you behave toward other races? What is prejudice and why does it exist?

Sociology can't make racism go away and it can't make it any less disturbing. It probably can't even make the issue of race and racism less loaded than it already is. But it can help us understand racism and understanding is an important start.

===== Intro (0:29-0;39) =====

As always, let's start by defining our terms. For one thing, what's the difference between racism, discrimination, and prejudice?

Prejudice is a rigid and unfair generalization about and entire category of people. So what exactly do I mean by unfair? Well, a prejudice assumes that something you think to be true for a whole group applies to every individual member of that group too, with little or no evidence.

Prejudice often takes the form of stereotypes or exaggerated and simplified descriptions that are applied to every person in a category. Negative stereotypes are often directed at people that are different from yourself. Which means that people that are a minority in a population are more likely to be negatively stereotyped.

For example, two common stereotypes of people who use government assistance are that they're A: African-American and B: gaming the system. But both of these ideas are demonstrably false. The majority of people on welfare are white and people who use social services like welfare are also likely to need the extra help.

But these stereotypes lead people to claim that black Americans, particularly single mothers, are lazy or untrustworthy. This example is a specific type of prejudice: racial prejudice.

Racism includes beliefs, thoughts, and actions based on the idea that one race innately superior to another race. Some take this definition further and argue that racism is inherently tied up in structures of power.

Meaning that racism specifically refers to the belief that a race with less societal power is inferior to other races. And, of course, racism can be explicit or implicit.

Explicit bias refers to the attitudes or beliefs we have about a group that we're consciously aware of. But implicit biases are a little bit more insidious. These are the unconscious biases that we have about other groups.

While we might easily recognize an explicit act of racism like calling someone a racial slur, we often don't consciously recognize how implicit biases affect how we interact with each other.

For example, a 2007 study by University of Colorado social psychologist Joshua Correll and colleagues found that people's implicit bias comes into play when making judgments about how likely it is that a person is holding a gun.

Participants in the study played a video game in which the goal was to shoot people who had a gun. But not shoot unarmed people. Participants were more likely to mistakenly shoot an unarmed black man than an unarmed white man.

This was true whether the participants in the study were white or black, and it didn't change, regardless of what explicit biases the subjects said they had.

What did seem to matter was if the subject said he or she was aware of stereotypes about black men and gun violence, even if the subjects adamantly disagreed with those stereotypes.

That said, it does seem like training can make a difference. The sample for this study contained both a sample adult community members from Denver and a sample of police officers. The study found that police officers who are trained to recognize when someone has a gun or not, were less susceptible in racial bias in who they shot than a community member was.

Also, we should note that, like many studies in psychology, this is a small sample design. About 130 members of the community and 230 police officers participated in the study.

So prejudice is about what people believe, but discrimination is a matter of action. Discrimination is simply described as any unequal treatment of different groups of people.

Most of us think about discrimination in terms of specific actions. Like calling someone a racial slur or refusing to do business with a certain type of person. But racism can be bigger than one individual.

Let's go to the Thought Bubble to talk about Institutional Racism.

===== Thought Bubble (3:53) =====

Institutional prejudice and discrimination are the biases that are built into the operation of society's institutions. Like schools, banking systems, and the labor force.

The concept of institutional racism was highlight by civil rights activists Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton in the 1960s who argued that institutional racism is harder to identify and therefore less often condemned by society.

Carmichael and Hamilton compared society's response to the suffering cause by white terrorists bombing black churches, to the lack of attention given to thousands of black children who suffered for different reasons. Like from the lack of access to quality housing, food, healthcare, or schooling.

Bombing black churches is an overt act of racism motivated by racial hatred, so it's easy to understand as racism. By contrast, elevated rates of sickness of death which stem from structural disadvantages aren't the fault of any one individual's racial animus, but it still results in discrimination on the basis of race and itt's much more likely to go unnoticed because there's no single person to blame.

Together, prejudice and discrimination form a vicious cycle that entrenches social disadvantages. The cycle starts with the prejudice taking hold in society, often as a strategy for consolidating economic or social power for a certain group.

This prejudice then motivates discrimination against the minority group. Both at an individual and institutional level. Which forces the group into a lower position in society.

Then this social disadvantage means that the minority group is seen as less successful and therefore inferior to the majority group, seemingly justifying the original prejudice and the cycle continues.

Thanks Thought Bubble.

===== End Thought Bubble (5:22) =====

So that's what racism is. Now, why does it exist?

One theory of prejudice is known as Scapegoat Theory. Also known as frustration-agression. Scapegoat Theory frames prejudice as a defense mechanism on the part of frustrated people who blame another, more disadvantaged group for the troubles that they face.

Even when those troubles stem from structural changes.

Economic anxiety is seen as a common trigger for scapegoating. Fear of losing jobs leads to blaming immigrants for taking jobs rather than looking at how globalization and automation have changed the economy.

A second theory was proposed in the 1950s by German sociologist, Theodor Adorno and his colleagues, who were trying to understand how fascism and anti-semitism took hold in Germany before and during World War II.

The Authoritarian Personality Theory sees prejudice as the outgrowth of a certain personality profile - on that's associated with authoritarianism or the desire for order, tradition, and strong leaders who will maintain the status quo.

People with authoritarian personalities tend to see society as hierarchical, which people who are naturally superior having the right to power over others. So according to this theory, racial prejudice is heightened when an authoritarian personality feels there's some moral or physical threat to their way of life.

Both this theory and the Scapegoat Theory see prejudice as a reaction that certain types of people have; people who are frustrated or people who have a certain personality type.

A third theory of prejudice takes a different tactic. Culture Theory claims some prejudice can be found in everyone, because people are products of the culture they live in - and we live in a prejudiced culture.

This is what some people mean when they say "everyone's a little bit racist". Or that or they just like quoting Avenue-Q. We learn racial prejudice and stereotypes through a kind of cultural osmosis.

For example, American history textbooks tend to be written from a Euro-Caucasion perspective and focus mainly on the contributions of white people rather than other cultures.

And this relates to yet another approach which measures prejudice in terms of social distance. In the 1920s, American sociologist Emory Bogardus developed the social distance scale, which measures how closely people are willing to interact with people from different races and ethnicities.

Social distance is a kind of proxy for how much of an other you see members of another race. Just like how geographic distance makes you more likely to generalize about a group of people who are different from yourself, social distance increases the likelihood that you might hold stereotypical or prejudiced views about another racial group.

And the final theory of prejudice is one we've talked about before: Conflict Theory.

Race-Conflict Theory focuses on how social inequality develops as the result of power conflicts between racial and ethnic groups. Under this theory, prejudice is a tool for maintaining the power of the majority. For example, the argument that 'whites are a superior race' was used as a justification for slavery and the racial discrimination that continued long after slavery ended.

So people may think about and treat each other differently based on their race or ethnicity in many different ways. But the ways in which racial groups interact within a society are often described by sociologists in terms of four broad patterns: pluralism, assimilation, segregation, and genocide.

Pluralism is a state in which all races and ethnicities are distinct, but have equal social standing. This isn't a society that's color blind, per se, because people still have different racial heritages that are recognized in society. But, in terms of how social and economic resources are distributed, the color of one's skin plays no role.

So is the US pluralistic? Eh, not exactly. The United States is pluralistic by the letter of the law, but in a practical sense, there's still a lot of racial and ethnic stratification and despite having equal legal standing, all races do not have equal social standing.

Now, in contrast to pluralism, in which different races remain distinct, assimilation describes the process by which minorities gradually adopt patterns of the dominant culture.

By adopting the modes of dress, values, religion, language, and lifestyles of the majority culture, minorities are sometimes able to avoid prejudice or discrimination, but assimilation is much easier for some groups than others. And it's easier if you look and sound like the group that you're trying to assimilate to.

A third pattern of racial interaction is to just not interact. Segregation is the physical and social separation of categories of people. Racial segregation has a long history in the United States with the racial minorities historically being segregated into lower quality neighborhoods, occupations, and schools.

Much of the segregation under the law, also known as de jour segregation, has since been prohibited through court cases and laws such as Brown v Board of Education. But de facto segregation, or segregation due to tradition and norms still remains.

People live in neighborhoods, attend schools, and work mostly with people like themselves. This self-segregation has led to high levels of racial stratification.

About 1/4 of black people attend public schools that have more than 90% students of color. And those schools tend to have less resources available to them.

De jour school segregation may be over, but de facto segregation has all but ensured that hte public school system remains separate and unequal for many Americans.

Sometimes, however, racial prejudice has consequences beyond segregation and inequality. Racism can lead to genocide, or the systematic killing of one group of people by another.

Whether we're talking about the attacks on indigenous populations by colonizers starting in the 1600s, the Armenian Genocide by the Automan Empire during World War I, the Holocaust during World War II, or modern examples in Rwanda and Darfur, genocide represents some of the worst of humanity. And it is usually motivated by racism.

We can't talk about race without taking about how people have

used racist attitudes as an excuse for violence and subjugation. But hopefully what we've talked about today will give you some context for thinking about how race plays out on a societal scale.

Today we talked about prejudice, stereotypes, racism, and five theories for why prejudice exists. We talked about discrimination and the legacies of institutional racism and we ended with an overview of four types of racial interaction: pluralism, assimilation, segregation, and genocide.

===== Credits (10:57) =====

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