UNDERSTANDING PREJUDICE

Attitudes towards minorities

Stonewall

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by Gill Valentine & Ian McDonald

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Preface: No room for complacency

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL means removing the barriers that still remain for some in society and maximising the potential of all our citizens, whatever their background. We have made lots of progress in recent years, but we must not be complacent – there is still much work for us to do to achieve the culture change necessary to ensure a fair and more inclusive society.

Happily, Britain is a country in which, for the vast majority of citizens, difference is a matter for celebration. However, to eradicate the prejudice and negative attitudes that still exist, we need to understand the nature of prejudice. Just as importantly, we need to understand the links between the different types of prejudice that are, sadly, still experienced by some people.

I am pleased that Stonewall has recognised the importance of these links. Understanding Prejudice has the potential to serve as a valuable tool in informing the development of public policy. It exemplifies exactly the sort of 'cross-strand' approach to the equality agenda that will be demonstrated by the Government's proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

This body will have a remit to challenge discrimination, champion equality of opportunity and promote human rights. It will also, for the first time, provide institutional support for laws outlawing workplace and vocational training discrimination on grounds of religion and belief, sexual orientation and – in time – age.

When I read the report, I was heartened to see that, despite the prejudices that exist in some areas, there is still a respect for difference and the rights of others in Britain. That is what we all want and are working towards to ensure that all sectors of society in Britain feel included, valued and respected.

JACQUI SMITH MP
Minister of State,
Department of Trade and Industry,
Deputy Minister for Women and Equality

Introduction: From tolerance to respect

THERE EXISTS a catalogue of research into the nature of prejudice against individual groups in wider society – such as that founded on race, disability or sexual orientation. However, until Stonewall published the forerunner to this research, Profiles of Prejudice, in 2003, there had been little investigation of the links between these prejudices.

Based on nationwide polling carried out for us by MORI, Profiles of Prejudice found objective evidence of substantial links between different sorts of prejudices. It established a strong correlation, for example, between people who hold racist views and those who are homophobic.

Profiles of Prejudice also produced firm evidence that some prejudices are still considered socially acceptable while others have become socially unacceptable. It suggested that persuading people to address one type of prejudice, such as racism, in isolation could risk their displacing it with another considered to be more palatable.

Understanding Prejudice builds on that research and seeks a fuller understanding of the nature of prejudice among white majority Britons. To secure that, 10 focus groups and 30 interviews were conducted in a range of locations in which the minority landscape varies, from inner London to the rural South West.

The findings of these parallel pieces of research have significant public policy consequences. Effective strategies to tackle prejudice, in almost every context, cannot begin from the assumption that people will accept they are prejudiced. Such assumptions need to be challenged and addressed first.

And strategies to tackle prejudice of any sort – whether racism, sexism, homophobia or any other – also need to be built upon an appreciation that prejudices are all too often linked. Failing to make that connection may simply shift intolerance of one minority group on to another.

But Understanding Prejudice also demonstrates a significant culture of respect within the white majority population. It confirms that levels of acceptance are linked to knowledge and understanding, something that should embolden all who believe that the struggle against intolerance is worthwhile.

Encouraging people to respect every one of their fellow citizens, regardless of background, is central to Stonewall's vision for twenty-first century Britain. We believe that approach will secure equality and fair treatment across the board for both minority and majority communities of every sort.

We hope that Understanding Prejudice serves as an effective stepping-stone in helping to realise that vision.

BEN SUMMERSKILL
Chief Executive, Stonewall

Executive summary

In 2003, Stonewall published quantitative data showing the extent of prejudice against minority groups in England. Published under the title, Profiles of Prejudice, it surveyed nearly 1700 adults throughout England and showed that prejudices against minority groups often overlap. For example people who are prejudiced against an ethnic minority are twice as likely to be prejudiced against lesbians and gay men.

Profiles of Prejudice also suggested that focusing on hate crimes, as often happens in politics and the media, was obscuring the everyday ordinariness of prejudice. Stonewall, therefore, decided to embark on a further piece of research that would drill down further into the causes of prejudice in this country and help us understand more deeply what triggers and sustains prejudice against minority groups.

Understanding Prejudice is the result of this second piece of research. It is qualitative research that took the form of a series of focus groups and one-to-one interviews. These were held in three regions – the South West, the West Midlands and London.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Types of prejudice demonstrated by majority Britons range from aggressive at one extreme, with the most explicit carrying the threat of violence, to benevolent prejudice. With benevolent prejudice, the speaker does not intend to be less positive about a minority group but expresses stereotypical views that are negatively received.

2. It is clear that it is no longer socially acceptable to be prejudiced for no good reason. However, feeling less positive towards a social group is not regarded as prejudice if it can be justified.

3. Groups who challenge majority views on a cultural level include lesbians, gay men and Asian people. This is often manifested in terms of what 'we' and 'they' do, particularly in public places, and the perceived extent to which these groups do or do not adhere to what are regarded as traditional British values.

4. There is a strong perception that the white majority is being unfairly treated and that minority groups are receiving preferential treatment. The two main justifications for such prejudices remain economic and cultural. Groups from whom an economic threat is felt include asylum seekers, travellers and black people. They are often accused of 'taking' jobs, housing or benefits.

5. Marginalised young, white heterosexual men tend to be least socially integrated. But because they often justify their prejudices in economic and cultural terms, these can be regarded as rational or well-founded attitudes, making them hard to challenge.

6. Prejudice can serve positive ends for the prejudiced person. For example, expressions of homophobia make some people feel they are being good Christians. While prejudice against asylum seekers can support an individual's sense of belonging to a local community.

7. Negative experiences tend to produce powerful negative generalisations against whole groups, yet positive encounters do not work in the same way.

8. Alongside prejudice, there is often a perceptible tolerance towards minority groups. However, this should not be confused with respect. Tolerance can be expressed as a grudging acceptance of a group and is often conditional upon groups keeping a low public profile. Overt displays of affection by lesbians or gay men, or the use of Asian languages in public, do not

Profiles of Prejudice

■ Understanding Prejudice follows Stonewall research published in 2003 called Profiles of Prejudice. This was based on nationwide polling carried out by MORI. Profiles of Prejudice found that a majority of the population – 64 per cent of respondents – were prejudiced against at least one minority group.

■ There was a significant tolerant minority – 36 per cent – who expressed no prejudice against minority groups. Those most likely to be respectful of minority groups were women, people aged 15-44 and people educated to A-level and above.

■ There were four minority groups against whom respondents most frequently expressed prejudice. These were refugees and asylum seekers, travellers and Gypsies, people from minority ethnic communities, and gay or lesbian people.

HOW COMMON IS PREJUDICE?

Say they are not prejudiced against any minority group — 36

Say they are prejudiced against one or more minority groups — 64

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
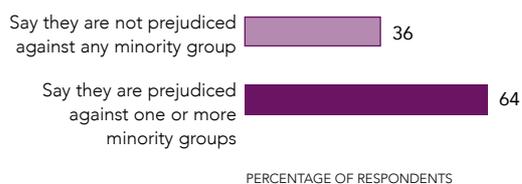
PEOPLE WHO EXPRESS PREJUDICE AGAINST MINORITY GROUPS

Older people — 0.8
Disabled people — 2.5
Gay or lesbian people — 6.8
Ethnic minorities — 7.2
Refugees/asylum seekers — 13.6
Travellers/Gypsies — 14

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE
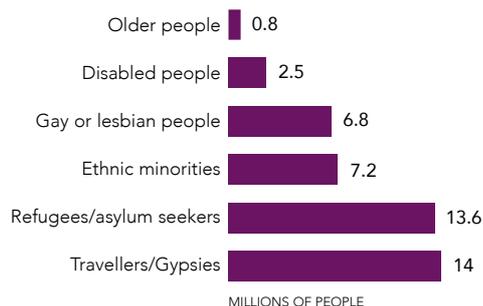
WHAT INFLUENCES PREJUDICE?

Political beliefs — 10
Law and public policy — 10
Religious beliefs — 13
School — 14
Friends — 19
Newspapers — 23
Television — 26
Parents — 32

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
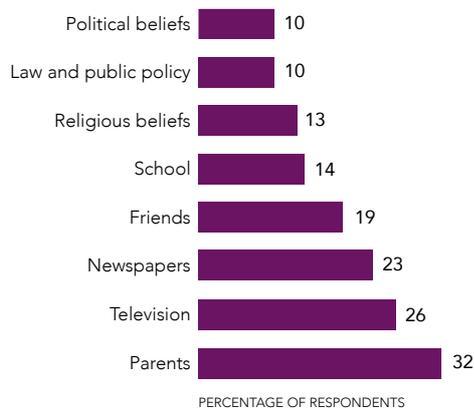
Source: *Profiles of Prejudice, 2003*

meet with approval. Similarly, minority groups are expected to conform to stereotype so that, for example, the image of a black professional is simply not recognised by people.

9. Respect can be found within the white majority population; it is about accepting and recognising the diversity of different groups in society. A condition traditionally posited as producing respect is contact with a member of that social group. However, it is not just contact itself, but the nature and quality of that contact that is important. Working relationships are particularly effective in developing respect for minority groups.

10. An emphasis on sameness and the importance of minority groups fitting in shows a significant lack of appreciation for difference and for notions of equality and human rights.

11. Contact in public spaces, without engagement, is not enough to foster respect and can even exacerbate prejudice. Seeing young black men, Asians or asylum seekers on the street is linked to fear and anger just as seeing visible lesbians and gay men in public spaces can lead to expressions of prejudice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. Government, agencies and minority groups must work together if they are to tackle the common issues around prejudice that all minority groups face. They need to adopt a national approach to solutions.

13. Because informing people about minority groups can foster resentment, campaigns designed to reduce prejudice should teach the value of difference both within minority and majority groups.

14. Workplaces are an important means of positive contact between majority and minority groups. Employers should work to develop a workplace culture that fosters this contact.

15. Policy makers and practitioners should work with the media to present more positive images of minority groups. They should also work with schools and colleges to train people to interpret more critically the information they receive through the media

16. More research is needed to enable policy makers to benchmark prejudice as it is expressed now and monitor the success of strategies to reduce prejudice.

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1 Specific prejudices

Profiles of Prejudice, a survey of nearly 1700 adults published in 2003, found that a majority of the population – 64 per cent – were prejudiced against at least one group. Of this majority, 16 per cent acknowledged less than positive feelings towards three or more minority groups. Following on from Profiles of Prejudice, this research has focused in more detail on the nature and extent of the prejudices that white majority people hold towards particular minority groups. This chapter looks at the specific prejudices they express towards six groups: lesbians and gay men, disabled people, transsexuals and transgendered people, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, and travellers and Gypsies.

Lesbians and gay men

1.1 There is a grudging and conditional acceptance of this group. This is expressed in rather contradictory ways. For some people, lesbian and gay sexuality is regarded as natural, which supports a view that they should not be discriminated against because 'they can't help it'.

For others, lesbian and gay sexuality is acceptable because it is about the freedom or right to choose how you live your life. Both forms of acceptance are usually conditional upon lesbians and gay men keeping a low profile in public spaces.

'They're OK as long as they keep themselves to themselves and don't push it on others.'

Woman, 50s, West Midlands

1.2 Prejudice against lesbians and gay men is gendered. Heterosexual men fear overt gay male sexuality, which they describe as 'disgusting' and 'repulsive'. Heterosexual women do not have similar fears of lesbian advances. Gay men's sexuality is also elided with paedophilia. Although lesbians are not accused of corrupting children in the same way, there is some concern that lesbian mothers deprive children of a father or a male figure in their lives. Generally, there is much less concern about lesbianism as a public issue than male homosexuality.

1.3 Much prejudicial talk about lesbians and gay men is not expressed in negative or hate talk but rather in terms of positive stereotypes about gay culture. For example, lesbians and gay people are described as 'happy' or 'fun' and heterosexual women talk about valuing gay men for their supposed feminine qualities.

Disabled people

1.4 No interviewees openly acknowledged that they were prejudiced against disabled people. This does not appear to be because people regard it as socially less acceptable to admit this prejudice. Rather, it reflects the fact that disabled people are not regarded as either an economic or cultural threat to the white majority population.

Personal contact is also a key driver of respect. More interviewees had had direct personal contact with disabled people than any other minority group, or had themselves experienced a temporary disability at some point in their lives. They recognised the need for an equality agenda for disabled people, especially in terms of service provision. Paradoxically some interviewees complained about the personal inconvenience they had encountered as a result of the need to adapt buildings to accommodate people with physical impairments.

1.5 The language used about disabled people focuses on helping them. This contrasts strongly with asylum seekers who suffer a huge deficit of care and compassion. There is a sense that care is a scarce resource and that the disabled and old people are the groups most deserving of this. Yet this apparently positive talk is in itself a form of prejudice because of the way that disabled people are implicitly regarded as lacking competence, vulnerable, and deserving of pity.

1.6 Interviewees commonly expressed anxiety about how they should respond to disabled people and described feeling uncomfortable or self-conscious in their presence: not knowing what to say or do. In this sense some prejudice is unintentional in that it is an unwitting product of ignorance or even a desire not to be prejudiced.

'My brain automatically goes on to the things you shouldn't do, and the things that you've been told are bad to do to people with disabilities. I get paranoid that I am going to do one of those things, or that I'm going to be obviously referring to this checklist of things that I shouldn't do. I can't just act naturally as much as that's what I want to do.'

Woman, mid 20s, London.

1.7 Among disabled people, mental health service users face particular discrimination. A clear distinction was made by interviewees between people with mental ill-health who were 'good' (those who helped themselves and kept themselves to themselves) and those who were 'bad' (those who didn't, or couldn't, help themselves and were visible on the streets).

Interviewees expressed an ignorance of mental health issues and wariness about how to respond to people with mental ill-health that they meet on the streets. In contrast to attitudes to physical disabilities there is a common assumption that care for this group should be provided in private by families.

Transsexuals and transgendered people

1.8 There are strong parallels between the attitudes expressed to this group and those expressed towards disabled people. The most common response was a tolerance born out of pity.

Most interviewees had no personal contact with transsexuals except in terms of entertainment shows. While this group is not regarded as threatening, a strong lack of respect for transgendered people is often expressed through laughter.

Asylum seekers

1.9 This is the group towards whom the most open and blatant prejudice was directed, often expressed in terms of anger. It is generally socially acceptable to express such views and there appears to be little social sanction against this form of prejudice.

1.10 There is no recognition of differences within this group and there is also a tendency for some interviewees to depict all non-white people as asylum seekers. Asylum seekers are the only group with whom no interviewees described having any day-to-day interaction beyond seeing large groups. By far the most important source of knowledge here is local rumour and gossip.

'You know the Government are letting so many of them [asylum seekers] in here and they're putting them here, there and everywhere and not asking people what they want. You know they might not want those people.'

Woman, 30s, South West

1.11 This prejudice is always explained in economic rather than cultural terms. Asylum seekers are accused of receiving preferential treatment in terms of housing and consumer goods, benefits, work and health care.

Interviewees in the West Midlands and South West expressed a strong sense of resentment that the Government was failing to help these areas cope with declining manufacturing and agriculture, yet it was providing financial support to 'undeserving' asylum seekers.

In London, asylum seekers were also associated with organised crime and with sexist and disrespectful attitudes towards women. In the West Midlands there was talk about the threat to the country's women and girls from packs of young men.

1.12 In some cases prejudices against asylum seekers were used to mobilise anti-European prejudice as well. France and Germany were accused of making the UK the dumping ground of Europe.

'When I was growing up, we used to have what they called a horse fair in the village. Travellers and Gypsies from all over the country came, and they were fine. They used to bring a fair with them and we had a great time, but, I think I'm a little bit intolerant of travellers now, because they've changed over the years.'

Woman, mid 50s, West Midlands

Minority ethnic groups

1.13 Prejudice was expressed more openly in relation to Asian rather than black or other minority ethnic groups. Cultural and national differences within the category Asian – be it Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Pakistani or Indian – were not recognised.

Although, there was admiration for what were regarded as Asian people's hard working and family values, this group was described as posing a cultural, rather than an economic, threat to British identity.

Asian people were perceived as not being prepared to integrate with white British people and were accused of taking over the country with unreasonable demands to build mosques and speak their own languages. Less commonly, Asian people were also described as dirty, undermining local neighbourhoods and, in some cases, as a potential terrorist threat.

1.14 Black people were described in more positive terms as being good at integrating with white people and as sharing similar social and cultural values. Whether individuals belonged in Britain was defined in terms of how long they had lived here, whether they had a white parent or partner and their perceived contribution to work. However, these generally positive views were contradicted by blatant prejudice towards young black men. Not only were young black men stereotypically associated with drug dealing, gangs, crime, and mugging, it was also argued that there had been a clear generational shift in black people's attitudes, with young people having much less respect for white people than older black people. In London there was also reference to black people, like asylum seekers, taking all the jobs. When presented with an image of a black professional, one focus group could not say what the picture represented as, to them, it was a contradiction in terms.

1.15 Chinese and Jewish groups were largely invisible. Most interviewees' only contact with these minority groups was in commercial situations such as a Chinese restaurant. Both groups were respected for being hard working and keeping themselves to themselves. However, some negative views were expressed towards Jewish people in terms of the policies of the State of Israel.

Gypsies and travellers

1.16 Like asylum seekers these groups attracted openly prejudiced comments, indeed asylum seekers were often labelled 'gypos' and 'tramps'. Prejudices towards travellers and Gypsies were expressed in economic terms. It was argued that these groups did not conform to the system by paying taxes, they had a reputation for unreliable business practices and they did not respect private property.

They were also criticised in cultural terms for not belonging to a community and allegedly having a negative impact on the environment: for example, they are unsightly, dirty or unhygienic. A clear distinction was also made between Romany Gypsies, respected for their history and culture, and travellers or modern Gypsies.

Gender

1.17 The majority of prejudiced views expressed in the research were directed at, or framed in terms of, men: male asylum seekers, gay men, young black men and so on. Minority men are both more visible and more active than women and pose more of a threat in terms of violence or sexual harassment. The invisibility of minority women reflects the wider marginalisation of women in society.

2 Patterns of prejudice

This chapter looks at patterns of prejudice across the range of minority groups in order to highlight multiple discrimination issues. It looks at how white majority people justify prejudices, which are not always expressed in terms of outright hostility, and it identifies different types of prejudice.

2.1 It is socially unacceptable to be prejudiced against a group for no good reason. Admitting to this kind of prejudice means you are regarded as a bad person.

2.2 However, feeling less positive towards a social group is not regarded as prejudice if it can be justified. Interviewees put forward justifications based on a perceived unfairness in the way government treated minority groups and in the perceived attitudes of minority groups towards the white majority. So, for example, they accused minority groups of securing preferential access to housing and benefits, stealing jobs and showing a lack of respect.

These justifications were commonly contradictory so that asylum seekers were simultaneously described as stealing jobs and as not wanting to work. Meanwhile Asian people were depicted as good workers who loved their families although, at the same time, Asian men harassed white women and their families undermined the neighbourhood. Because interviewees justified their prejudices in such ways they regarded them as rational. The certainty displayed in these views makes them hard to challenge.

2.3 A common element in the justification of prejudice is that minority groups do not behave like 'us' or fit in with 'us'. Here, 'us' refers to a notion of values or cultural principles in which white majority culture is defined in terms of the importance of family life, fairness, the English language, freedom and democracy. Therefore feeling less positive towards minority groups is not recognised by many people as prejudice but rather is seen as an inevitable result of the failure of minority groups to integrate or adopt British values.

There is more tolerance or indifference to groups who are less different, or becoming more like the white majority. However, this is not the same as respect, which appears only to come from close contact. Tolerance is conditional on a minority group's perceived conformity and invisibility – in other words, keeping themselves to themselves.

An emphasis on sameness and the importance of minority groups fitting in shows a lack of understanding of diversity and difference and of notions of equality and rights. This finding has clear implications for the work of the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

2.4 Interviewees did not express negative attitudes to all groups equally. Attitudes to different groups varied in terms of the justifications people provided for feeling less positive towards them and the nature and intensity of the prejudice. Asylum seekers, Asian people and travellers attracted most open animosity or aggressive prejudice; disabled people, lesbians and gay men and the elderly received less aggressive responses. Few individuals expressed negative attitudes towards most or all the groups discussed.

However, this does not mean that some prejudices are more important than others. Rather, it shows that it is more socially acceptable to express some prejudices than others. Less visible or banal prejudices can still have profound consequences for people from the minority groups affected, and they may be harder to tackle because they are less obvious.

2.5 There is no awareness of possible crossover between minority groups, for example, that a gay person might be black or that an asylum seeker might be disabled. Arguably, organisations that represent minority communities need to identify and make these multiple discrimination issues more visible.

2.6 Prejudice is gendered. People are most prejudiced towards men, especially young, black or gay men and male asylum seekers. They have more empathy for women.

2.7 White majority women have higher levels of implicit prejudice, whereas white majority men are more likely to talk in explicit terms of the need to do something about 'them'. Heterosexual men tend to have more prejudices against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals than do heterosexual women. Older people are more prejudiced than younger people.

These findings replicate those of Profiles of Prejudice in which 23 per cent of men expressed prejudice against a minority ethnic group, compared with 13 per cent of women. Profiles of Prejudice also found that 31 per cent of older people, aged 55+, expressed prejudice against lesbians and gay men, compared with 9 per cent of people aged 15-44.

2.8 Even between minority groups, divisions are made between good and bad, deserving and undeserving members of these communities. These divisions are made according to how like 'us' these minority groups are, and the extent to which they are visible in public spaces.

2.9 People commonly invoke examples of people more prejudiced than themselves to justify why their views are not prejudiced.

2.10 Prejudice was often defined by participants in terms of emotions. Anger was most evident in terms of asylum seekers and the need to keep Britain for white people. Emotions of disgust and repulsion were most commonly used in relation to lesbians and gay men. People very rarely expressed hate. This may be because hate is less easy to justify than anger or repulsion. In particular, frustration at perceived injustice and a lack of ability to do anything about it produces 'justified' anger.

2.11 Some interviewees who expressed aggressive prejudice argued that there was a 'rising tide of anger' towards asylum seekers and that unless something was done local people would take vigilante action.

> 'The Muslim issue will get bigger. I think there's a storm coming, with a lot of civil unrest. The move should have been made a long time ago to cap it. The immigration and asylum problem is only a fraction of the real problem.'
>
> Man, 50s, London

Group or peer dynamics seem to play an important role in the escalation of hostility. Individuals with high levels of prejudice appear to reinforce each other's attitudes and behaviour, resulting in an increase in prejudice. This process of reinforcement and escalation may contribute to the development of extreme forms of anti-social behaviour and violence.

2.12 Some interviewees admitted that they had acted on their prejudices in non-violent ways, such as jokes, name calling, and verbal abuse. These responses were defended as justified. For example, one interviewee described verbally abusing an Asian shopkeeper because he felt that he had been slighted by him. These forms of prejudice are cathartic for the teller and are a way of passing off the unacceptable as acceptable.

2.13 Terms such as 'coloured' and 'Paki' were used as part of standard speech, without apparent ill-intent and did not appear to be understood by other participants as negative. This type of prejudice is ignorant because people are unaware that their language is offensive, and banal because it is mundane and unnoticed. In contrast

> 'I'm sitting down in Westminster, there's a [gay] demonstration going on and these guys are entitled to demonstrate, they're having a lovely time, they're all having fun, the only problem what sickened a lot of people round about…the guys were kissing.'
>
> Man, 40s, London

terms like 'nigger' and 'fag' are widely recognised as derogatory and their use is frowned upon.

2.14 Interviewees used positive or benevolent stereotypes to talk about lesbians and gay men as fun. They used caring stereotypes of disabled people, branding them as vulnerable and in need of protection. These stereotypes are not intended to demonstrate a less positive attitude towards these groups, but lesbians, gay men or disabled people can experience these views as negative and discriminatory. This benevolent prejudice demonstrates a lack of understanding of what being disabled or lesbian and gay can mean; a lack of awareness of the more serious discrimination that these groups often experience; and the changing expectations and rights of these minority groups.

Other research has suggested that these benevolent attitudes can play an important role in the social exclusion of particular groups, for example because labels like 'nice', 'kind' and 'helpless' can define some minority groups as not competent or suitable for powerful positions.

'One guy … from his elbow to his hand was plastic, and you saw the plastic fingers kind of bending. I found myself really staring at him, not wanting to, but just half curious and intrigued, and half thinking poor guy.'

Woman, 20s, London

2.15 Prejudice is bound up with the use of public space. This is because in public spaces people encounter minority groups but do not have personal contact with them. Seeing young black men, Asians, or asylum seekers on the street is linked to fear and anger. Other key spaces of intolerance are leisure and entertainment spaces and shops. Here minority groups are tolerated if they show enough respect for white people but tensions and negative encounters are commonplace.

2.16 There is resentment towards political correctness or the need to 'talk right', particularly in institutional contexts. Prejudices appear to be most openly expressed in private within family or close social circles.

2.17 Less prejudiced people often ignore prejudice among others because they lack the confidence to challenge it or fear the consequences of doing so. Individuals described finding it harder to challenge the prejudices of people they were close to, such as family and friends, than strangers.

'When I go and watch my son play football, there will be remarks from people standing next to me. It becomes offensive, and I find it offensive… but if you say something, you're a nagging old woman.'

Woman, 40s, South West

2.18 There is a general awkwardness among white people – even those who are least prejudiced – when it comes to talking about race and disability. This can result in silence or avoidance of these issues, which is itself a form of prejudice.

3 Joined-up prejudices

Previous chapters have identified specific forms of prejudice against particular minority groups and patterns of prejudice. This chapter highlights five types of prejudice that are characterised by varying levels of social acceptability and forms of justification. It also looks at some of the commonalities in the type and nature of prejudices experienced by different minority groups.

3.1 This research has thrown up five types of prejudice:
Aggressive prejudice: open and explicit animosity, often backed with the threat of violence.

Banal prejudice: mundane or implicit examples of less positive attitudes towards minority groups, which may be intentional or unintentional, that pass unnoticed.

Benevolent prejudice: expressions of positive views about minority groups that are not intended to demonstrate less positive attitudes towards them, but which may still produce negative consequences.

Cathartic prejudice: a release of views recognised as being less positive about minority groups, and therefore unacceptable, that is justified and therefore rendered acceptable.

Unintentional prejudice: attitudes or behaviour that unwittingly demonstrate an ignorance or lack of understanding of diversity and rights issues.

3.2 Both asylum seekers and black minority ethnic groups are associated with economic threats such as taking jobs from white people or general criminality.

3.3 Both Asian minority ethnic groups and lesbians and gay men are regarded as cultural threats to traditional English values and ways of life.

3.4 Asian minority ethnic groups, lesbians and gay men and people with mental ill-health are acceptable if they are not visible in public spaces. This attitude contrasts strongly with that towards people with physical disabilities, for whom there is recognition of a need for more public forms of support.

3.5 Disabled people, transsexual and transgendered people and, in some cases, lesbians and gay men experience benevolent prejudice. This contrasts strongly with asylum seekers, travellers and Gypsies who are the subject of aggressive prejudice.

3.6 Minority ethnic groups and disabled people experience most unintentional prejudice. In particular, there is a discomfort and a lack of understanding about how to talk about race and disability issues and how to talk to people from these minority groups.

3.7 Asylum seekers, travellers and Gypsies are the only groups with whom interviewees have had no personal contact. In contrast, most have had some personal contact with a disabled person.

3.8 Prejudice against travellers and Gypsies is transferred onto asylum seekers who are described as 'gypos'; in turn prejudice against asylum seekers is transferred onto all minority ethnic groups, and used to mobilise prejudice against them

3.9 Cathartic and banal prejudices are evident towards all minority groups.

3.10 Men are more likely to exhibit aggressive prejudice and women banal or benevolent prejudice.

4 Causes of prejudice

There are a variety of reasons why people become prejudiced against minority groups whom they perceive to be different. For example, there is a strong sense among white majority people that they are being treated unfairly by national and local government in relation to minority groups. Participants in the research expressed this unfairness in economic and cultural terms and used it to justify less positive views towards different minority groups. Other issues also influenced their prejudices. These included media, religion and contact with minority groups.

Perceived economic injustice

4.1 A perception that minority groups are receiving preferential treatment from central and local government, in terms of job opportunities, benefits and housing, is producing resentment and a sense that undeserving groups are being prioritised over the hard-working white majority. This resentment is used to justify less positive attitudes towards minority groups.

Here, strong local or regional factors come into play. Flows of anger about specific local economic situations are directed both at government and particular minority groups, notably asylum seekers. In the West Midlands the debate largely centres on work; in the rural South West housing and the perceived failure of government to address rural deprivation is of major concern, and in London it is benefits and crime.

These views are underpinned by a general perception of poor management of the social infrastructure in terms of housing, hospitals and education.

Perceived cultural injustice

4.2 A strong contrast is drawn between what 'we' do and what 'they' do, particularly in terms of dress, religion, language, values, morality and public civility.

Some minority cultures – particularly South Asian – were accused of being exclusive and of not exhibiting openness to white culture. Participants also argued that ethnic minority groups did not show the sort of respect for white culture that white majority people were expected to show towards their cultures. There was some bitterness about the way in which South Asian cultures were perceived to be celebrated in multi-cultural, anti-racist education at school, and a sense of injustice that these groups received public resources to support their cultures while white, English culture was undervalued.

Indeed, some people even regarded white people as victimised: undervalued and excluded by virtue of being white, and culturally invisible.

4.3 Visibility in public space is crucial to arguments about the perceived cultural threat posed by minority groups. Various spatial metaphors including 'invasion', 'taking over', 'being out of place' or 'not knowing their place' are used to justify the cultural threat allegedly posed by various minority groups.

Here, self-evident notions of what is appropriate in public and private space are crucial to enable people to rationalise their views as non-prejudiced. In other words, individuals state that they believe in individual freedom and are not prejudiced against minority groups, yet at the same time they express hostility towards seeing mosques in their neighbourhood or hearing languages other than English spoken in the supermarket.

'It doesn't bother me whether people [are] black, white, pink, green or, you know. But… there are a lot of temples being put up in London and places like that. And this is England, you know.

Woman, 30s, South West

These contradictory views are reconciled by the explanation that it is alright for minority groups to practise their own culture or religion at home as long as they do not do so in public. These judgements are presented as justifiable, self-evident views, rather than personal prejudice.

Lack of personal contact

4.4 The two groups identified as the most threatening

– asylum seekers and travellers – were the only groups with whom most interviewees had had no contact. Disabled people received the least outright hostility. Participants and interviewees had most awareness of, and contact with, this group.

Negative encounters

4.5 Contact alone does not break down prejudice; the nature and quality of the contact is important. Negative experiences appear to produce powerful, negative generalisations across whole groups, yet positive encounters tend not to change opinions towards a whole group with such speed and permanence. In other words, in negative encounters minority individuals are perceived to represent members of a social group, but in positive encounters minority individuals are read only as individuals and not as members of a group.

Media

4.6 Profiles of Prejudice identified television (cited by 43 per cent) and newspapers (cited by 40 per cent) as the key influences on prejudice against refugees and asylum seekers. In particular, two fifths of people who felt less positive towards refugees and asylum seekers were influenced by newspapers. No other prejudice is as influenced by the newspapers as this.

> ### 'And most of them [asylum seekers] claim benefits, like the one who was in the paper, getting £20,000 of back benefit.'
>
> **Man, 40s, London**

Interviewees in this study denied that the media caused these kinds of prejudice, yet several processes were evidently at work. First, the media set the terms in which public debate occurs and provide the stories and material that are used to justify people's prejudices. Examples and facts from the media are passed on as accurate and independent of the individual's view or prejudice because they are corroborated by others. Second, the media encourage latent feelings, usually of anger and disgust and, third, the media produce a sense of powerlessness among white majority people that there is nothing to be done about the issues that concern them.

Rumour

4.7 There is a general lack of trust in official sources and, paradoxically, the media inducing comments such as 'they are not telling us everything'. As a result informal sources and gossip from friends and contacts are given a lot of credence. This process of information dissemination often leads to the circulation of negative views and paranoia (especially in relation to asylum seekers and travellers) and supports the justification of prejudice because it produces consensus – that is, other people saw it or think the same.

Intergenerational prejudice

4.8 Contrary to previous studies prejudice is not passively passed down through families. Intergenerational differences in views and values are commonplace, even if these differences are not openly addressed within individual families.

The Church

4.9 Some participants identified the Church as promoting prejudiced and intolerant views.

> ### 'If you go to church you expect people to be Christian and to be willing to accept other people and that doesn't happen. It's very old school.'
>
> **Woman, 40s, South West**

Prejudice serving positive ends for the prejudiced person

4.10 Homophobia may reinforce people's positive sense of themselves as good Christians. Prejudice against asylum seekers can support an individual's sense of membership of, and support for, a local community.

5 Geographies of prejudice

There are strong similarities in the nature and cause of prejudices in all three regions where the research was carried out. However, these were also expressed through the lens of local issues. This chapter looks at the particular issues that influenced attitudes in each region.

West Midlands

5.1 The research was carried out in a former industrial area currently experiencing social and economic deprivation. Many of the prejudices towards asylum seekers, Asians and travellers reflected this economic hardship. Prejudice was often framed in terms of different groups' relation to work. There was a strong sense of injustice and a belief that minority groups received privileged treatment from government in comparison to white people who have worked hard all their lives in industries that have now disappeared.

Rural South West

5.2 As with the research area in the West Midlands, there was a strong sense of injustice that the Government 'up country' did not understand, and was not tackling, rural deprivation but rather was privileging minority groups. Prejudice here, rather than being framed in terms of work, was largely framed in terms of housing. House prices have been driven up by second home owners forcing local people in the low wage agricultural and tourism economy out of their towns and villages.

There was a strong and unsubstantiated fear that asylum seekers would be relocated to the area. There was a general fear of outsiders bringing crime and disruption into the locality.

'Down here, because they are old fashioned and community people, they stick together. They do look after their own … because the Government are not giving enough authority to the police to sort things out.'

Woman, 30s, South West

Like the research area in the West Midlands, there was a masculine work culture based on hard manual labour on land and at sea. Perhaps as a result, homophobia was more accentuated here and there was a greater imagined willingness to address any future incursions by minority groups with vigilante action.

However, these prejudices were offset by a strong sense of local community which has provided a traditional support network for disabled people including people with mental ill-health and the elderly. There was also a reservoir of tolerance and even respect for local individuals from minority groups who were known to everyone but in the tradition of the village eccentric. However, this positive attitude does not necessarily extend to these minority groups as a whole.

London

53 London is a multi-cultural and diverse global city. The research was conducted in one of the most culturally diverse boroughs with an indigenous white working class population as well as significant Afro-Caribbean, South Asian and Turkish communities and a growing number of refugee and asylum seekers. On top of this cultural diversity, the area has undergone a process of gentrification in the past 10 years which has driven up property prices beyond the reach of the majority of local residents.

The interviewees here had more experience of living and mixing with a wide range of people, and most had some positive experiences of minority groups or at least neutral experiences. It is the only location in which the interviewees had children or relatives who were in dual heritage relationships or families. There was a sense of pride that coming from London was about respect and tolerance for diversity.

However, interviewees still expressed concern about asylum seekers and non-white groups taking advantage of the welfare system and receiving preferential treatment in terms of benefits, housing and health care. There were also fears of overcrowding not expressed in the other locations.

6 Conditions that produce respect

Despite the patterns of prejudice already outlined, a significant number of people demonstrated a respect for difference and the rights of others. Some respondents did not regard themselves as prejudiced, even though, as chapter three suggests, they may have demonstrated unintentional prejudices. However, this chapter also shows that a key influence on attitudes towards minority groups is the nature of the contact they have with white majority people.

6.1   Previous research has suggested that the best way to reduce prejudice is to bring different groups together so that people can learn about each other. It is argued that contact reduces people's feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about others by encouraging a sense of familiarity and therefore predictability and control. This is known as the contact-hypothesis.

Profiles of Prejudice found that people who knew someone from a different ethnic group were half as likely as those who knew no one from a different ethnic group to be prejudiced against minority ethnic people. Likewise, it found that people who knew someone who was lesbian or gay were half as likely as people who did not know any lesbian or gay people to be prejudiced against them.

However, this research suggests that it is not contact alone that produces respect. In some cases contact between different social groups, notably in schools, can be socially divisive and lead to the hardening of attitudes against minority groups. Rather it is the nature of contact that is important.

'At my school there was a lot of hostility. Outside of school we never mixed, we kept ourselves to ourselves.'

Man, late teens, South West

It is friendship, often started at work or as a result of neighbourhood help, rather than superficial contact, that encourages people to move from prejudiced to non-prejudiced views. Some leisure activities, such as martial arts or dance classes, can also allow individuals to connect with other people and cultures in positive and meaningful ways.

6.2   Empathy is crucial in developing a sense of care, compassion and respect for others. This is fostered by people experiencing some form of prejudice (for example, anti-Irish racism or prejudice against a disabled sibling) or having spent time abroad as a minority in a different culture.

6.3   Positive contact with minority professionals, such as Asian doctors or gay employers, develops respect for these individuals and other professionals from their group. However, it does not appear to produce a more positive general attitude to a minority group.

6.4   Higher education and independent travel are experiences that help white majority people to develop an enquiring attitude towards different people and cultures, and to make links with their own culture and forms of knowledge.

6.5   Individuals who have the skills to take a critical approach to the media and who draw on a wide range of information sources are better able to connect to wider issues and are less ready to adopt prejudiced positions.

6.6   People who consider their own lives to be full of opportunity and are most optimistic about the future talk in the least prejudiced terms.

6.7   Those with a belief in the primacy of the individual appear to be less prejudiced when assessing people because they are willing to judge people on their own merits rather than on their membership of a social group.

7 Policy implications

This research has identified the diverse forms that prejudice takes. It can be aggressive, banal, benevolent, cathartic and unintentional. The report has also highlighted the patterns in which prejudice is expressed towards different minority groups. Given these patterns, a range of strategies is needed to tackle the different ways in which less positive attitudes manifest themselves. It is important that banal, benevolent and unintentional prejudices are tackled with as much commitment as aggressive and cathartic prejudices.

7.1 There is a great deal of confusion about what constitutes prejudice. The emphasis interviewees placed on the need for minority groups to be 'like us' and their resentment towards political correctness suggests that there is a general lack of understanding of diversity, difference and rights. This has important implications for the work of the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

7.2 Strategies to reduce prejudice must not begin from an assumption that people will recognise themselves as prejudiced. Most people who are less positive towards minority groups do not regard themselves as prejudiced because they consider their views to be justified or fair. Prejudice-reduction strategies must challenge these justifications, particularly the sense of unfairness in resource allocation and cultural rights that many white majority people feel.

7.3 The strong similarities in the prejudices articulated in different parts of the country imply that we need national policies to reduce prejudice rather than only targeting areas with significant minority populations.

At the same time, perceptions of unfairness that underpin prejudices are based on subtly differing economic and cultural conditions. As such there is also a need for regional and locally sensitive policies that challenge white majority anger and frustration.

7.4 There are clear gender issues evident in relation to prejudice. Men are the group most likely to act out their prejudices through violence. Therefore, strategies to tackle aggressive prejudice must address the social integration of marginalised young, white men and the problem of the disproportionate involvement of men in crime generally. There is also a need to address the invisibility of minority women in people's perceptions of minority groups.

7.5 The contemporary focus on hate crimes can obscure the ordinariness of everyday prejudice in terms of verbal abuse and incivility; pity and sympathy; or unwittingly derogatory language. As a result, many individuals fail to recognise their own beliefs and actions as a form of prejudice.

7.6 Challenging stereotypical views can accentuate rather than breakdown prejudice. Education or experiences that challenge beliefs in homogeneity within both minority and majority groups might be more effective.

7.7 Strategies to reduce prejudice have centred on what is known as the contact-hypothesis. In other words, the best way to reduce prejudice is to bring different groups together so that people can learn about each other. However, it is the quality and nature of the contact, rather than the amount, that is most effective in challenging prejudice. For example, workplaces appear to be important locations for fostering natural positive contact and friendship.

7.8 There is a need for social and institutional initiatives in popular public spaces, such as entertainment spaces, shops and restaurants, to encourage positive personal encounters between people from minority and majority groups. These spaces are often places where people from different social groups encounter each other but have no personal contact to challenge their prejudices.

7.9 People feel most comfortable expressing prejudice at home, and are more reluctant to challenge the prejudices of people they know than those of strangers. There is a need for more work to look at the home as a potential focus for prejudice-reduction programmes.

7.10 Education or training – through schools, workplaces, unions and even soap operas – can address banal prejudice by developing people's skills to know how and when to challenge other people's prejudice.

7.11 Some specific institutions such as the Church and the tabloid press were identified as encouraging or promoting intolerant views and values.

7.12 Positive soap opera and film characters, and responsible documentary programmes, encourage some individuals to change their views towards minorities and to respect other social groups.

ACTION LIST

Work together. Minority groups face many of the same issues around prejudice, so it is vital that government and all minority groups work together. This should be a key issue for the incoming Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

Adopt a national approach. There are strong similarities in the prejudices shown across diverse geographical locations. This suggests that strategies designed to reduce prejudice should primarily be national strategies.

Target marginalised areas of white majority society. Young white unemployed men are more likely to act out their prejudices through violence. Policy makers and practitioners need to concentrate their efforts to reduce prejudice on these sections of society.

Rethink how we inform people about minority groups. Informing people about minority groups and their culture can help reduce prejudice, but it also risks fostering resentment. Campaigns designed to reduce prejudice should teach the value of difference both within minority and majority groups.

Develop workplaces that foster respect. Workplaces are important sources of natural, positive contact across majority and minority groups. Employers have a role to play in creating workplace cultures that encourage this contact and therefore develop respect

Educate young people to read media critically. The media is a key source of people's attitudes towards minorities. Government and minority groups need to work with schools and colleges so that more people know how to interpret the information they receive through the media.

Present more positive images of minority groups. Policy makers and minority groups must work together to influence journalists and broadcasters with a view to improving the way in which minority groups are represented in the media.

More research. Understanding Prejudice is just part of what must be an on-going research programme into the nature of prejudice in this country. We need to continue with a programme of research that will enable us to benchmark where we are and monitor progress we make in tackling different types of prejudices against minorities.

Methodology

We held ten focus-groups discussions and 30 in-depth autobiographical interviews with white majority participants between February and April 2004. This research was based in three contrasting locations: London, the West Midlands, and the rural South West. Details of the specific locations have been withheld to protect the anonymity of those who participated in the study.

LONDON was chosen because it is a multi-faith, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural city with relatively large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, and a visible lesbian, gay and bisexual community. Despite the growth of hate crimes recorded in the capital and the presence of active BNP groups, Profiles of Prejudice found that this area exhibited the lowest level of negative feeling towards minority ethnic communities.

WEST MIDLANDS is more mono-cultural and provincial than London. The specific location where the research was conducted is a traditional white, working class area, that today experiences high levels of deprivation. The area has higher than national average levels of unemployment, and a significant proportion of the population have no qualifications. Both mortality and the prevalence of long-term illness are higher than the national average.

The area has been specifically identified as a cluster area in the National Asylum Support Service's dispersal policy. This location enabled us to focus on the effect that socio-economic deprivation and monoculture have on the existence and expression of prejudice.

RURAL SOUTH WEST is a predominantly white, rural area, characterised by a lack of visible minority groups. A focus on this area enabled particular consideration of issues linked to this lack of visibility.

The research design included both group and individual methods because previous research has shown that some individuals feel more comfortable expressing particular attitudes in a social context with others, whereas others may only feel able to talk freely in a private, one-to-one situation.

The focus groups were used to look at shared values and general issues (for example, the role of the media) whereas the individual interviews were designed to examine the particular processes that shape the development of individuals' attitudes.

This qualitative research builds on a questionnaire survey conducted by MORI for Stonewall. For the quantitative research, 1,693 adults aged 15 and over were interviewed by MORI/Field & Tab across 167 constituency-based sampling points. In addition individuals were handed a supplementary self-completion questionnaire that was distributed among the sample because of the sensitive nature of the questions. The data was weighted to reflect the national population profile. The results of this poll were published in 2003 as Profiles of Prejudice.

Definitions

Prejudice is defined as feeling less positive towards a group of people.

In talking about different minority groups we have used language that most people understand and respond to:

- Lesbians and gay men was used rather than lesbians, gay men and bisexual people.
- The generic term disabled people was used to cover those with physical and sensory impairments, learning disabilities, long-term health conditions and mental health service users.
- Ethnic minorities was used instead of minority ethnic.

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UNDERSTANDING PREJUDICE
Attitudes towards minorities

Stonewall