

Ableism—Essay 4

When one is born, one doesn't have prejudice imbedded in them. Prejudice is learned from peers, society, parents, the media, etc. Most individuals aren't as skillful as one should be when it comes to interacting with people we distinguish to be culturally different. Sometimes, even individuals with good intentions occasionally say or act in a discriminatory and prejudiced way without even knowing. Social influence is one of the main factors that can change one's behavior and attitude toward certain other groups or individuals. Person with disabilities (PWD) are a minority group that is least talked about, but are one of the most oppressed groups. Generally PWD are discriminated by being treated like outcasts because they are seen as incapable compared to non-disabled persons. There are different strategies that can be used to reduce discrimination and prejudice by the multidimensional approach. An individual needs to be aware that we all have prejudice and we must increase our knowledge and learn how to eliminate stereotypes. This can happen early in a person's life if the education system had more opportunities for PWD and encouraged more intergroup contact (intergroup contact theory). Amir (1976) states that, "Interaction between people changes their beliefs and feelings toward each other.... Thus, if only one had the opportunity to communicate with others and appreciate their way of life, understanding and reduction of prejudice would follow" (Whitley Jr & Kite, 2010, pg. 551).

Before 1990, people with disabilities face injustices and were invisible to society. People with disabilities were assumed to be abnormal, stupid, and were sometimes even forced to go through "cleansing" to try to become normal. This segregation were said to be used to keep these individuals invisible from a biased society. By the 1940s and 1950s, World War II veterans who returned with a disability began to pressure the government to help them out with rehabilitation

training. Since the government didn't really pay attention to their requests, these veterans began to bring disability issues known around the country. During the civil rights movement in the 1960s, advocates began to work with other minority groups to also demand equal rights. Four years later, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 came into law that didn't allow discrimination on the basis of religion, race, gender, national origin; however, the act didn't include people with disabilities. Therefore, their strategy was to continue lobbying, campaigning, and fighting to get equal rights as well. Years passed and finally in the year 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed. This act actual and proposed success was that this act, "prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment, State and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation" (The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

Generally in society people with disabilities are viewed not as a mental or physical defect but as a minority and cultural identity. This ism is one of the least talked about isms in society. There isn't much attention to people with disabilities and the oppression they face. On an individual-level, the way for prejudice to reduce needs individuals to accept that their behavior is, at times, built on prejudice or stereotyping; therefore, individual interventions are needed to reduce prejudice. These kinds of interventions, "...are focused directly on helping humans develop to a higher level of functioning and are usually in the form of workshops, seminars, and other educational approaches" (Kurpius, Fuqua, & Rozecki, 1993, pg. 604). Each individual has implicit bias which is naturally activated and sometimes unintentional, which are connected to discriminatory outcomes. This bias is a powerful factor of one's behavior because individuals lack personal awareness of these and it can happen in spite of conscious non-prejudiced intentions or perspectives. For example, there is a stereotype that people with disabilities are

incompetent than the able-bodied and always in need of assistance from someone else. Therefore with these types of interventions, it will help by improving human development by paying attention on altering beliefs, knowledge, motivation, feelings, or behavior.

In order to be able to begin reducing prejudice and discrimination against PWD, there must be an institutional intervention, starting with the educational system. School is a perfect example to begin to show children at a young age on how to treat people equally. Research says that, “what children learn in the preschool years greatly influences whether they will grow up to value, accept, and comfortably interact with diverse people or whether they will succumb to the biases that result in, or help to justify, unfair treatment of an individual because of her or his identity” (Derman-Sparks, Gutiérrez, & Phillips, 1999). Starting off small with children at a young age would be a good and to continue throughout their youth years in school. Especially since in school there isn't really much acknowledgment about people with disabilities and/or apart students with disabilities in other classrooms could make students not want to have contact with them because they don't know how. Therefore, reducing prejudice initiatives should take place in education because it builds on the contact theory through the hypothesis that activities like instruction, cooperative learning, and multi-cultural courses will aid in decreasing prejudice in another style that contact alone may not be enough to. With these types of strategies, it will encourage more positives through challenging the myths and stereotypes about people with disabilities, increase one's knowledge, improve outlooks on out groups, and increase more group unity. In addition, schools should treat people with disabilities with more opportunities just like the able-bodied. If in education systems PWD had equal treatment, according to the contact theory, the able-bodied students would engage in intergroup contact.

For people with disabilities, the capability to reach developmental goals sometimes depends less on their disabilities than on their relationships with friends, family, interactions with their managers and schools. People with disabilities are human beings as well as the able-bodied; their disability doesn't classify their personality, skills, etc. By learning more about people with disabilities, interacting with those individuals more often, and accept that there is prejudice in all of us and work on eliminating prejudice beliefs and stereotypes, we will be on the right track to reducing prejudice in ourselves. However, the essential for change lies within society's environmental and social aspects.

References

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