

The Origins of Discrimination Pertaining to All Kinds

Why were different forms of discrimination so widely accepted far before our time? On what basis did discrimination originate?

Discrimination is an issue that started to be publicly acknowledged ever since humans started finding their way around. Why does our society struggle with discrimination as much as we do now? From race to gender, to religion, today's world continues to witness the idea that one kind of human is greater than the next. Discrimination at first glance is a jarring idea. At least in our age, the idea that people should be treated fairly and equally is taught to many from a young age. Then why do many still believe that bringing another down is naturally just? Or from the standpoint of the dominant religion in America, Christianity teaches that God made us all in His image. As a whole, each and every one of us was made from Him creating two beings. If we are all from those beings, are we not all equal? Since Christians believe that we came from the same first man and woman on this earth, why are they so quick to discriminate against one another simply from the color of someone else's skin or who/what someone believes in? Why do humans think they can decide which human is better than the next?

In this paper, I will talk about the nature of discrimination and the many struggles it has caused through the years. The first question to be asked is about how far back discrimination goes. When did it begin? Then, after we find its historical origin, the next question is to understand all of the different forms, variants, and manifestations of discrimination - including racism between races, as well as racism within a race, sexism, religious discrimination, and so on. Third, after identifying different forms of racism, I will look at various arguments or justifications people have provided in favor of

discrimination. Finally, I will show why those arguments are wrong, demonstrating why discrimination has always been unjust.

1. A Brief History of Discrimination (How Far Back Does Discrimination Go?)

Although scholars may debate the precise origins of discrimination, the phenomenon is undoubtedly deeply ancient. (Aristotle) We are accustomed nowadays to thinking about discrimination in the modern world, but as a starting point, we might learn something deeper if we look back to discrimination's earlier roots.

Discrimination can be seen in something as ancient as biblical narratives. In the book of Exodus, there is a man named Moses, and in this telling, the Israelite people are explicitly discriminated against as different from other Egyptians and treated poorly as a result. For instance, during the time of Moses' birth, baby boys who were Israelites were singled out for killing, out of a belief that they might rise up when they came of age. Later in the book, many Israelites were made slaves to do the Pharaoh's bidding which made him feel "more kingly" simply because he possessed the power to force others to do his bidding. Furthermore, the choosing of a specific group of people to do one's bidding and deeming them as the lesser during that time shows us how segregation and discrimination began very early on in our collective conscience.

To take these points even further, one might wonder whether discrimination in fact started at the very beginning of the biblical narrative that pervades our culture: "The Fall of Man" in Genesis. Towards the beginning of the Bible, it is said, "Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for[e] him." (Genesis 2:18) Many see that as a blessing,

although it could be viewed differently. Why should a woman be created simply for the man's enjoyment or to aid the man? While the truth could be that God intended to make everything good, another truth is that people have used this passage to justify discrimination against women; and that raises the question of how good our reception of it can really have been. It is stated clearly in the text that woman was meant to be a helper. Seeing as God is all-knowing, surely he knew that this would cause tension amongst His people. The term "helper" could be deciphered in different ways. Regardless, it is sometimes used as a justification as to why women are inferior to men. So this can lead many to believe that our creator believed that women were only meant as an aid to men, making discrimination by gender just.

Discrimination is therefore deeply ancient, but over the years, it has appeared in nearly every place and in many different forms. To take just one example of its manifestation in modern times, *I am Regina* is a book based on the French and Indian seven-year war in the year 1775. In *I am Regina*, we see discrimination mainly dealing with gender and race. This story talks about how the Indians captured a young girl around 10 years old named Regina and forced her to do unimaginable things against her will. They stripped her from her family, made her learn their language, forced her to do their work for them, and more. There is also a moment within the story when Regina is almost forced to have intercourse with a boy much older than her. During this chapter, we see that the boy is clearly belittling her by using the power he has over her. He does this by making her feel inferior because she is a young girl and he is physically stronger than her. This story is a prime example of discrimination because it talks about the hardships she faced because of her race and gender, and how the Indians belittled her out of a perception of her inferiority towards them.

As we can see, discrimination is old news. Because the types and manifestations of discrimination are so wide and pervasive, it would probably be difficult to pinpoint one precise *starting* point for the entire phenomenon. So there will always be an ongoing question of ‘how far back does discrimination truly go?’ But regardless of the specifics, the takeaway is that discrimination has *always* been with us; now we should diagnose its different types.

2. Different Types of Discrimination (What are the different forms or manifestations of discrimination?)

Having seen how far back discrimination goes, I now want to discuss the numerous types of discrimination. Many tend to believe that discrimination pertains mainly to race when that is not true. There is also sexism, discrimination against those with different religions, and more. But even when it comes to race, there is a difference between racism between racial groups and racism within the same racial group.

Addressing first racism within the same racial group, many think that a person within a particular race cannot be racist to others within the same race; while in reality, racism can be at its highest within the same racial group. An example of this is black-on-black hate. While people do not often realize it, there are many examples that occur within people’s day-to-day lives. Within schools, many black children can be bullied for being too whitewashed by other black children, or for not being black enough. One way in which this kind of in-group racism manifests is through the view that, if a black person doesn’t have a certain amount of black friends or if they don’t “act ghetto,” then they “want to be white so bad” - when that should not be anyone’s business. Why should others be allowed

to put an expectation on someone else because of their skin color? Why is dressing one way, talking a certain way, or being friends with who you want to be friends with dictating how “much of a race” one person is?

Moreover, some first-generation African immigrants tend to hate Black Americans because they are “too ghetto,” while this is yet another unethical approach. They bring down their own people by saying things such as “they’re probably in a gang,” “they probably do drugs,” or “they definitely don’t have a job.” They stereotype their own because they truly believe they are better than them and above them. This form of in-group discrimination can pertain to other races as well like Hispanics, Asians, Caucasians, etc.

But really, there are no limits to how one race could be racist towards another. One example is during Covid when many different races rioted against Asians because they believed that all Asians were the reason so many countries were suffering. While the virus is said to have originated in an Asian country, this doesn’t give anyone the authority to belittle others due to their skin color.

Furthermore, discrimination due to someone’s gender is a worldwide issue because of abuse of power. It is a widely known phenomenon that women are looked down upon more openly simply because of the fact that they are women. Even around the 1800s, women were meant only to be “breeders” and to work in a kitchen. (Newsela Article) Women were frowned upon if they had an education or acquired a job because men wanted to have that upper hand. Similarly, men can also be discriminated against due to derogatory allegations such as all men are lazy, drink all the time, engage in violence, are less likely to care for their own health, etc. Due to these allegations, men can feel degraded

and subject to others believing that those allegations are the way men are expected to act throughout their daily lives.

These only scratch the surface of the types of discrimination that are possible. There are many other types of discrimination and unjust actions that cause hurt and hardship to people who do not deserve it. Because of this, as humans, we should all strive to end unnecessary hatred and quit justifying our revolting actions toward innocent people. But in order to do that, we first need to understand what those attempted justifications are, and why they are ultimately wrong.

3. Justifications and Motivations for Discrimination (Why did people think it was just? Why does Discrimination Exist?)

Having seen just a sampling of the different types of discrimination, I now want to discuss the justifications that people have provided for discrimination. What is really motivating people to discriminate against others? What is driving this human nature? Why were different forms of discrimination so widely accepted far before our time but still perceived as just at this present time?

Justification #1: it is the natural order, people not wanting to change the *status quo*, or having lifestyles that are embedded with or rely on discrimination

First, some important theorists have justified discrimination in dealing with the natural order of our society. Thinkers such as Aristotle believed that discrimination, mainly dealing with race is part of our natural order as human beings. He believed that “in order to be *just*, social norms must reflect what is *natural*. Accordingly, society may practice slavery if there are some people who are naturally

suiting to be slaves.” (Aristotle’s defense of slavery) Such a person would be a natural slave, Aristotle claims, meaning that they would inherently lack the capacity to rationally direct their own lives. Such people would need to be directed by those who can rationally deliberate.

Similarly, Mark Twain, author of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, wrote about the realities of racism in order to show those around him how unjust it is. He also wanted to convey to them that people with different skin tones can be cordial with one another or even be friends with one another. After writing *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain got a lot of hate and his novel was banned numerous times throughout the years. People refused to come to terms with this “new reality” Twain was conveying to them. They were set in the way their world was, i.e. colored people were meant to work in order that those who owned them can make a living. Not only was that displayed within Twain’s story but it was also shown through the behavior of those who disliked his book. Many during that time believed that colored people were meant to work for them just like cows and horses do. Twain wrote to spread awareness about the negative impact this was having on not only colored people but also the whites who knew what they were doing was incorrect but didn’t wish to be lynched. Many people within the town believed that having slaves was a just and correct thing within their world. They believed that without slaves the world wouldn’t be right anymore. Who was supposed to help them make money but not get any of the profit? Who was supposed to work in their fields day and night? Who was supposed to watch their children when they went out? Ignoring the fact that their thinking was incorrect, they truly believed that there were meant to be slaves, and without slaves, the natural order would be disordered.

Justification #2: because of the natural order, discrimination can also **benefit** those who are discriminated against.

Moreover, not only did some thinkers believe discrimination to be natural but also a benefit for those discriminated against. We have already seen that some thinkers like Aristotle believed that slavery was natural; but in fact, this sometimes has led them to the further conclusion that slavery actually benefits the slave. Aristotle discusses how he commends slavery and how it is “just and beneficial for them”(Aristotle). He believes that one being lower than the next is natural, maybe even a necessity to ‘living the good life’, additionally he believes that, “There are some human beings who naturally lack the capacity to deliberate, therefore, there are some human beings whose enslavement would be just and beneficial. Those who are enslaved typically lack the capacity to deliberate therefore, the typical slave is enslaved justly.” Many influential thinkers such as Aristotle have the twisted belief that it is truly acceptable that some should be looked down upon and serve an equal simply due to factors such as skin color, societal status, gender, wealth, etc. Did numerous people think this way because of a desire for power? Or maybe it was because they wanted to be like everyone else, so they continued down this rabbit hole of wrongdoings.

Justification #3: the desire for power (or domination or control)

Furthermore, power is something almost all humans wish to attain. Whether it is in the workplace or at home, power becomes the source of many people’s issues. This can pertain to discrimination as well. With men wanting to be ‘higher’ than women or even vice versa, power seems to

be the root of that particular desire. When it comes to gender discrimination, there is a common denominator, the need to feel more powerful than the other. In the home, men wish to be the head, meaning they have control over what happens within the home. This also pertains to women wanting to overpower men and attain the same level of power they have or even more. While this matter concerns gender discrimination, it can also concern racial discrimination.

Finally, numerous slaveholders thought that “slavery was an economically efficient system of production, adaptable to tasks ranging from agriculture to mining, construction, and factory work. Furthermore, slavery was capable of producing **enormous amounts of wealth** [for the owners of the slaves].”(Steven Mintz) Within this belief, we see that wealth was an enormous factor in the benefits of having slaves. Wealth is usually associated with power, and slaveholders craved wealth, so therefore, slaveholders wanted power. By having a certain amount of slaves doing work for the slaveholders diligently, the owner of the slaves could gain significant profit, therefore, being widely respected by his/her peers and gaining that power humans really wanted.

4. Realization of the Wrongs of Discrimination (Why have people come to realize again that discrimination is wrong?)

Given all of the justifications that we have just seen for discrimination, some may ask, why are certain people able to realize the wrongs of discrimination at some points, but not others? There are many explanations that could be offered as an answer to this question, but I think one stands out more than the rest. While discrimination has long existed with different kinds of justifications and believers in it, there is also a higher truth: humans *have* been able to see what is wrong with it. In this section, I

want to illuminate that and bring us on a path of hope and understanding about how we can continue to see the wrongs of discrimination and ultimately eliminate it. In explanation one, I talk about how many have common experiences as those discriminated against leading them to feel empathy for the victim because they understand what they're going through. In the second explanation, I talk about the 'ripple effect'. The ripple effect is when a negative/positive occurrence happens and it gets posted online or widely talked about resulting in it spreading to many people. And the final explanation is dealing with everyone's moral compass. I elucidate how everyone has a moral compass and how they know in their hearts what is wrong versus what is right and whether they choose to listen to it or not, shows a true person's character.

Explanation #1: Common experience leading to empathy: 'I have experienced something similar, or could experience the same'

Many first realize the wrongs of discrimination simply because they have encountered the same experience as the person dealing with discrimination. Due to this, they feel a certain level of empathy and guilt that 'forces' them to see how wrong discrimination truly is. Sometimes some will start movements against discrimination because of the intensity of the empathy they feel, but many tend to keep the guilt to themselves and only speak about it when spoken to. Furthermore, some only care because they fear the same could happen to them, and only then will they help those in need because of the agitation they feel towards the situation, rather than admitting that regardless of whether this could happen to them it is morally incorrect.

A famous poem called *First They Came*, by Martin Niemoller, exemplifies how those who fail to feel empathy for those who are unjustly treated will turn out if they continue to only care simply because they fear the same may one day happen to themselves.

First they came for the Communists

And I did not speak out Because I was not a Communist

Then they came for the Socialists

And I did not speak out Because I was not a Socialist

Then they came for the trade unionists

And I did not speak out Because I was not a trade unionist

Then they came for the Jews

And I did not speak out Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me

And there was no one left To speak out for me.

In the poem, the narrator talks about how the Nazis came for all different types of people, one after another. He goes on to tell the readers how he did nothing to help those people simply because they were not like him or they plainly were not him. But then at the end of the poem he tells the reader how the Nazis came for him but no one was there to save him because he was selfish and did not save anyone else simply because they were not like him. This is associated with empathy because, at the end of this poem, Niemoller has the realization that caring only for oneself well-being and a 'group' associated with the same as himself is self-centered and inequitable. Rather as humans all should strive to care for one another because we are all the same and deserve to be treated fairly.

Explanation #2: spreading information to others - 'ripple effect'

Usually, in many historical settings, when one person speaks up about a particular matter, others follow in their ways, spreading their information to others. An example of this is the George Floyd Case. Back on May 25, 2020, George Floyd was inappropriately treated for actions that weren't confirmed to be committed by him, and soon after killed by a police officer. Outbreaks such as these began to break out among many states causing people to rise up and stand against things such as police brutality and colored hate. Occurrences like these prove how when one person is brave enough to stand up and fight for the rights of others, many recognize their wrongdoings and band together with them to start the change.

Similarly, with the women's rights movement, women were sick of being undermined and subject to being only a housewife or belittled by men simply because they were women. "They wanted to be treated as individuals, not dependents of men." (Elizabeth Hilfrank) Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott were the two to start the women's rights movement because they understood the desperation and the defeatedness the women felt from the lifestyle they were given. The more people that stood up for these women, the more awareness was spread to many others allowing people to realize how unjustly these women were treated.

Explanation #3: inner moral compass' – everyone knows inside right from wrong

But ultimately, beyond these two explanations, the most important factor is one's moral compass. Many people have a tension between the beliefs that they were taught and their inner moral conscience. Everyone is born with a moral compass, whether they are black or white, gay or straight,

religious or non-religious, and more. Surface-level beliefs usually come from an environment or society one is set in while one's moral compass comes from their inner voice of conscience and the beliefs naturally rooted in the human heart. Because of this 'inner moral compass,' causes many to recognize why discrimination is wrong but does not always push them to speak up for those who are unjustly treated.

Some may ask, where does one's moral compass come from? Many claims that a moral compass comes from a set of beliefs someone holds, i.e. the beliefs that people find from the environment around them. But I disagree. Whether they choose to go with the given environment's beliefs or go against it and find their own, their moral compass comes from what they more deeply know to be right or wrong.

An example of this is in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* when Jim asks Huck to help him on his journey to freedom so that one day he can buy back his family and live the happy life he deserves. Huck is conflicted with the way he was brought up in his hometown and what he knows deep down is the right thing to do. He decides to go with his own beliefs and do what he believes is truly right, rather than going with what the townspeople would believe is right. Huck's actions portray how many, regardless of their upbringing, choose what way their moral compass will point them: the just way, rather than the unjust way. While the way you live your life and what you are surrounded by can heavily influence your decisions, deep down everyone knows and understand what is right and what is wrong, some people's compasses are simply tainted by the way they were brought up.

5. Conclusion

We increasingly see different instances of people being discriminated against from the color of their skin to their gender. While we may not know its exact origination, the importance of the subject is one that should not be taken lightly. Over the years its injustice has been recognized but many still seem to face its negative outcomes. Many tend to focus on the origination or why others believe it's an okay and just action. In reality, our nation should be striving to end hurting others simply because they are different from the majority of people.

From this paper, you should aim to try and be the change needed to ensure everyone is treated fairly regardless of their differences. While many seem to fall into justifying discrimination because of irrelevant thoughts on the subject matter, everyone should push to help each other because regardless we are all the same on the inside. Many tend to look at outward appearances or judge based on things culturally different from the 'social norm', which is incorrect. We should all be honest with ourselves about how our ideals and 'traditions' have failed us. Because of rooted beliefs and customs, many suffer for no just reason. While discrimination's origin will always be a pending thought in many minds, the real issue is the outcome discrimination has on people. Hopefully, this paper can open many eyes to the detrimental effect discrimination has had on several people and impel people to recognize how wrong it is.

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