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Class Code NUMBER

Communication in Contemporary Society

5-Step Analysis of Prejudiced Communication

In today's society, many instances present themselves in which people experience prejudice. It is everywhere, from the media to the workplace to schools; it affects many different situations and backgrounds of individuals and how those individuals are perceived. Whether it is racism, homophobia or just plain prejudice resulting from previous interactions with certain people, prejudice is a problem that needs to be addressed and solved within our society. I have seen instances of prejudice and it really bothered me, especially because I did not have the chance to prevent it or solve the issues at hand. After gaining more knowledge on prejudice, its causes and how to prevent it, I now wish I could go back in time to the event that I will soon discuss in more detail in this paper.

I remember back in high school a situation that actually involved myself. In high school I was very overweight. At over 230 pounds, I was a large person and had very few friends. High school was a hard time for me because I experienced prejudice almost on a daily basis due to my size. I can recall instances of being called "fatty" or "donut boy" and other discriminating and hurtful things. Being a relatively passive and non-confrontational person, I did not do anything about being picked on for my weight even though I would feel really hurt about being called such things. I just hoped and prayed that someday I would not be picked on anymore and that the weight would magically just fall off or something to that effect. Prejudice is very hurtful and counterproductive in our society. It is truly a shame that people are insulted and hated due to their body appearance but the fact of the matter is that it happens all the time.

I recall a particular instance of experiencing prejudice and it occurred back in high school. Every other day I would have to attend a gymnastics class. My high school was out in the middle of nowhere, so everybody knew everybody and there were a lot of cliques. The fact that there were groups of students that hung around each other and were considered popular made my

situation even worse, especially when that group was in my gym class. Gym was where I always felt most vulnerable because I had to change clothes in the locker room. Also, gym class is where the athletic people strive and the overweight, un-athletic kids suffer, both during athletic events and socially. One day we were scheduled to participate in a relay race. There were five teams and each team had around five students in it. The students were allowed to pick their groups on their own and of course the popular kids stuck together and the social outcasts did as well. I was one of the two overweight students in this class, so we got the worst of the ridicule and prejudice. We were for the most part the only kids picked on; it was the two of us against the gym class you could say. So it was time to pick teams and three of the teams were already made and it was time to decide who was going to be on the last two teams. The fourth group easily decided who would be on their team, so I was left along with the other overweight student to be on the last and final team. This always happened to me; I was always picked last, if even at all. In this instance a student named Jimmy commented, “We don’t want Matt and Eric on our team, they are fat and can’t run. It’s not fair, c’mon, split them up so it’s even guys, nobody wants them.” I always got this kind of thing and every time it happened it hurt me. It hurt even more though because I was directly called out by Jimmy and embarrassed due to the direct insult. Everyone else in the class heard it and Eric and I were the sole form of entertainment for those thirty seconds. This instance was a direct form of prejudice of overweight people.

Cognitively speaking, this statement was made because Jimmy had selective knowledge and beliefs that supported his dislike for overweight people. Jimmy did not know that in actuality I could run very fast despite my weight and that aside from looking unhealthy, I was in fact healthy. I was just in a stage of my life back then that made me larger. The time right before I hit puberty was a rough time for me and despite everything I did, I could not lose the

weight. Jimmy avoided overweight people because he did not know how to interact with them and he did not try to get to know them better. If he had made an attempt to meet more overweight people, he might have grown to like them more. Emotionally, we were hurt very much. It was hard enough to make friends being overweight and comments like this one made it that much more difficult to gain acceptance and to try to make friends. This comment was a direct attempt to disturb both of us emotionally and it was only due to our physical appearance, not anything to do with our true potential. What people do not understand is that even though a person may be overweight, they still have a great deal to offer society. They may be very talented in something that does not involve their size, like being an exceptional artist, or maybe being the next person to cure cancer. Prejudice just brings everyone down and dampers the emotional outlook of the victims. Behaviorally, Jimmy made negative comments in an attempt to avoid overweight people or to make them feel bad about themselves. He made a mean remark and we were the victims, that's the way it always worked. Although it is a shame that this happened, neither Eric nor I knew how to avoid this kind of situation and we did not have the tools to stop it. This is true of a lot of situations involving prejudice, if people knew how to effectively prevent or deal with prejudice, a lot less prejudice would exist.

Communicatively speaking, this prejudice could have been prevented by both of us, the victims and from Jimmy, the person who insulted us. If Jimmy would have been more communicatively competent he could have respectfully addressed the fact that he would rather be on another team and not have mentioned our weight. He could have said something like, "hey guys, I know you both have a lot to offer our team but I would rather just stick with my buddies. I am sure you both would make great teammates with another team." Also, as the victims, we could have done a better job at communicating. We could have told Jimmy in an assertive

manner that we do not like to be talked to that way as it hurts our feelings and only makes matters worse, and that we would like him to stop insulting people for being overweight. These tactics would have made the situation much better and would have prevented the prejudice that took place this day back in high school.

In this situation, the outcome was that Eric and I were stuck on the last team regardless of Jimmy's comment and we could tell that he was aggravated during the whole relay. The other part of the outcome was that we were emotionally devastated from this comment, as the whole class heard Jimmy call us fat. Who would want to hang out with kids who had just been made fun of that badly? We could have decreased anonymity in this situation by trying to call out the fact that Jimmy was in fact the only person making rude remarks and that the other classmates did not, in fact, find it cool but very rude as well. We overweight students could have banded together to form a group whose objective was to help stop prejudice towards overweight kids. We could have met with bullies to try to address the issues of why they acted the way they did and to try to create ways of not acting like that. We should have educated the students on how prejudice affects kids and on ways that they can prevent it within the classroom setting.

Prejudice is very hurtful and is uncalled for. People must become more knowledgeable about the people they have prejudices towards to truly gain a better understanding of that group and if they are in fact any way like these people who bully think they are. The victims could be polar opposites from the way they are preconceived by the bullying group. Certain communication techniques can be implemented when communicating that could avoid prejudice altogether and make the world a better place. Hate exists for certain reasons and those reasons are plain dumb and unproductive, we need to communicate more effectively to solve such

problems. Prejudice isn't good for anybody and I am so glad I now know how to effectively deal with it when it occurs.