

Our Learned Cultural Bias and Prejudice

What is my cultural bias?

Learning Culture is Learning Prejudice (and that's okay!)

If we look deeper into our learned patterns or responses, we see that behind our learned patterns lie cultural values. We learn how to be human in a particular way within a particular range of cultural values.

One way to think of our range of cultural values is to imagine our range as a filing drawer with a particular number of files each within an established category. This filing drawer (our value system) allows us to organize and categorize experiences and information. If something does not fit into one of these categories, it is often thrown out without further examination.

It is important to understand that the range of values supporting our learned responses or patterns is relatively narrow, given the broad range of responses available in cultures worldwide.

Our values are indoctrinated into us from birth. In a sense, our values are our prejudice. Prejudice is the human condition. All 'mentally healthy' human beings are prejudiced toward the automatic preference for certain clothing styles, political values, foods, and so on.

Am I prejudiced?

We might describe prejudice as a 'prejudgment'. We automatically learn and apply prejudice and the use of stereotypes to everything and everyone in our environment as a way to neatly process information. Prejudice is an unavoidable part of the human condition.

To be human means to learn right from wrong, true from false, good from bad, tasteful from distasteful, safe from dangerous, all in accordance with the values from our own culture. We need our value system, our ability to prejudge, in order to live in our culture in a rational way. An individual who did not exercise his or her prejudice by being unable to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad, etc. might be regarded as abnormal.

Our prejudice or prejudgement is neither positive nor negative; it is simply an unavoidable fact of our existence.

What becomes positive or negative is what we do with our prejudgments or stereotypes as we interact with others.

Extract from the *Tool Box of Ideas for Smaller Centres: Attracting, Welcoming and Retaining Immigrants to Your Community* (2007) published by the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria and reprinted with permission. The entire 88-page toolbox, along with ten one-page resource handouts like this one, can be downloaded from www.icavictoria.org/toolbox.htm.