

Ethnic discrimination not only based on prejudice

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Our belief in power hierarchies is important in how we view and treat people. This is shown in a dissertation by Alexandra Snellman from Uppsala University that examines how racist and sexist prejudice creates social hierarchies and ethnic discrimination in various situations.

Discrimination and hierarchies are created not only as a result of our prejudices but are affected by other factors as well. Alexandra Snellman has studied how the social hierarchies we inhabit and our belief in power hierarchies, so-called social dominance orientation, impact our view of other people. Her studies shows that socially dominant individuals, that is, those who have a strong faith in power hierarchies in general, also tend to create hierarchies and practice ethnic discrimination more than other people do.

The existence of and background to ethnic hierarchies have previously been studied only in the Netherlands and the former Soviet Union. Alexandra Snellman's findings show that an ethnic hierarchy exists in Sweden as well, where people have the least social distance to the upper groups and the greatest distance to the groups at the bottom of the hierarchy.

“Patriarchal culture, religious commitment, and how long immigrant groups have been represented in Sweden are among factors that probably affect where you wind up in the local hierarchy,” she explains.

The tendency to create such hierarchies is influenced, on the one hand,

by whether a person is socially dominant and, on the other hand, by ethnic prejudice.

Using experimental situations Alexandra Snellman also investigated the behavior of test subjects when they were asked either to help or to punish various individuals. The individuals they were to punish would be either ethnic Swedes or immigrants from the Middle East. Here, too, it turned out that the test subjects who were socially dominant gave immigrants stiffer punishments.

The dissertation shows that social dominance is linked to how much one identifies with manly social behavior. This was true of both men and women participating in the study the greater the identification with manliness, the higher the social dominance.

The dissertation will be publicly examined at Uppsala University on December 7.

Source: Uppsala University

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