

Special News feature

Discrimination at the University of New Brunswick. Does it exist?

Pakie, nigger, honkey, gook, chink, spic, jew, limie, bohunk.

These are only a few slang words used to discriminate against members of the human race.

We've all heard "the one about the pakie" or "nigger" jokes. They get a laugh in some circles. But when are they going to stop?

From generation to generation society has had mixed racial concerns. Society has also made attempts to change its occupants attitudes on the topic.

The Fredericton Human Rights Commission is one of society's organizations that offers advice on how to deal with racism.

"The Commission offers two vehicles for combatting racial discrimination," says Karen Taylor, Director of Education and Development at FHRC.

"There's the complaint process, and the educational and public awareness process".

Taylor really believes in, and quotes Theo van Boven, Director of the United Nations Division of Human Rights from 1977-82:

"One of the greatest challenges facing the human rights movement at the present time is to develop ways and means of promoting human rights at the grass roots level by informing and educating the people about their human rights."

Taylor says combatting bigotry is everybody's business.

"We tend to take our rights for granted, and sometimes we are unaware of what our rights are. We all share the responsibility in enforcing those rights. Unfortunately racism is an insidious problem in Canada even though we may not want to admit it. Participation from everyone is needed to deter segregation."

Complaining and educating the public is included in that participation.

Taylor says she's unaware of any racial discrimination cases being made by the UNB or STU community at the present. However, if students or faculty feel they

are being racially victimized, they can file complaints at the commission.

A Q & A pamphlet put out on the New Brunswick Human Rights Code says,

"If you file a complaint, an officer will investigate it thoroughly and submit a report. If the investigation confirms that a violation may have occurred, the officer will conciliate the dispute and attempt to arrange a settlement satisfactory to both parties."

Inquiries are kept in strict confidence at the commission and there is no charge fee for filling a complaint.

To educate the public, Taylor believes that educating children at a young age would be beneficial.

"Educating children regarding rights and respecting one another should begin at a young age. The development of positive attitudes for ourselves and others should begin at a very early age. The earlier one starts to talk about it, the sooner, one can develop a better attitude towards different races and their cultures."

For university students she suggests starting a campus support-study group, whereby victims or students interested in the topic, could meet.

"It could be a place where you could start confronting your own feelings about racism, question values and then learn from the experience."

Taylor also feels that more courses dealing with different races and cultures should be taught in educational institutions.

"It would be of great benefit to the society if more courses of this nature could be offered. We have to learn to get along, and cross cultural training could help start that process."

Taylor encourages anyone

Prejudice and discrimination: what do they mean?

by Lynne Wanyeki

Prejudice and discrimination are terms that we hear frequently nowadays. In one sense, this is a healthy reflection of the shift in attitudes that has occurred since the 1960's. In another sense, however, the very prevalence of these terms in today's usage means that the sense behind them is often misunderstood and thus misconstrued.

Prejudice literally means pre-judgement. We all have prejudices - stances adopted without rationally arguing out these stances in our minds. When it comes to race, prejudices most often take the form of stereotypes eg. white people have no rhythm, Black people are lazy, Chinese people are good at math, and Native people are drunks, etc. The problem with these sweeping generalizations is that they tend to influence the way we act.

When we act in a way that reflects a prejudiced state of mind, we are discriminating. Discrimination occurs when we act according to choices we have made about a particular person because of the race to which that person belongs eg. using derogatory terms, refusing to rent to Black people, not hiring Native people, etc. This kind of discrimination, often termed direct discrimination, is now widely recognized as being unacceptable, and few people would publicly admit to endorsing it.

However, there is another kind of discrimination, systemic discrimination, which is not yet as universally accepted as being either a valid cause for concern or detrimental to society. Unlike direct discrimination, systemic discrimination does not necessarily involve intent as a determinant of discrimination. As the term implies, systemic discrimination is the exclusion of persons of a particular race resulting from the very structures of a given societal system, be those structures educational, economical or political. Systemic discrimination thus takes into account the historical position of a particular race in a particular society, and recognizes that equal treatment now cannot possibly correct and make up for unequal treatment and exclusion at all levels of society in the past.

The solution that has been put forth is affirmative action. People who advocate for affirmative action hold that the structures and institutions of society should proportionally reflect the racial make-up of that society. They argue further that once proportional representation has been reached, the structures and institutions of power will change in a manner that will enable and ensure full participation by all, regardless of racial background. That goal requires drastic measures, such as hiring on the basis of race, to reach the desired representation. Quite naturally, affirmative action has been met with some resistance. Opponents of affirmative action term it reverse discrimination, stating that qualifications to do the job are being ignored, and that standards are being lowered in search of this proportional representation. Proponents of affirmative action reply that qualifications have never been ignored, and indeed are not the issue, and that standards are not being lowered but merely adjusted to better reflect the racial reality of today's society.

Opponents of affirmation are indeed correct when they state that it is reverse discrimination. However, unlike other forms of discrimination affirmative action does not seek to perpetuate consciously or otherwise the dominance of any given racial group over another. In a time of growing conservatism, when programs which seek to address the concern of disadvantage racial groups are coming under attack, it is wise that we examine our own beliefs and the ways by which we would choose address it.

who feels they are a victim of race discrimination to contact the Human Rights Commission at 103 Church St. Fredericton E3B 5H1 453-2301.

Some of the information provided at the commission includes articles on the International Day of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This is a day set aside on March 21 of every year to recognize racial prejudice worldwide, a day endorsed by the United Nations.

Other articles dealing with racial discrimination include:

"What If Someone Said I Hate You Just Because of the Colour of Your Skin?"

"Together we're better"

"21 New Things to Do"

"The Human Rights Act"

Additional information is provided at the Commission in the form of pamphlets and a small lending library. All of this reference material was recently put out by the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship.

Racial prejudice has always been a topic of heated debate. And if you're not up to an argument about colour, maybe the next time you hear someone or even yourself telling a racist joke, or using a racial slur, think about what you're saying. Maybe you will purposely forget the punchline.

- Melanie Jane O'Hara



Karen Taylor, Director, Education and Development New Brunswick Human Rights Commission. (photo Dave Smith)