

Ethnocentrism ^[1]

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Ethnocentrism is a key concept within anthropology. Ethnocentrism is the idea that the cultural group that you personally belong to is objectively superior to other cultural groups. Unfortunately, this belief can lead to prejudice and even discrimination.

The values and beliefs of a particular cultural group are built into various aspects, including religion, politics, language, and many more. When we grow up within our culture, we are inundated with these values and beliefs.

Ethnocentrism is the failure to acknowledge the relative value of another culture's beliefs and values. Due to a lack of knowledge about the functions and importance of a different culture's behaviour, there's a tendency for us to think that we always "know what's best" for other cultures.

To oppose ideas of ethnocentrism, anthropology has a long history of promoting cultural relativism. Cultural relativism counters ethnocentrism, as it proposes that each culture has value.

History

Originally, when anthropology was first formed as a discipline, anthropologists weren't particularly concerned with whether they were being ethnocentric. The term was first used in the late nineteenth century, and was later popularized by well-known anthropologists, such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, and Margaret Mead.

In-group bias

Ethnocentrism follows the same premises as the psychological phenomenon of in-group bias—also called in-group favouritism. This phenomenon involves favouring members of one's own in-group. An in-group can be any type of social group, either categorized by geographic location, ethnicity, gender, religion, or other criteria.

In-group favouritism often goes hand in hand with out-group negativity. Out-group negativity is often a consequence of favouring one's own social group, and involves negative attitudes towards another social group. These attitudes can lead to prejudice. An established example of out-group negativity is racial discrimination—an issue prevalent virtually everywhere in the world.

Consequences

Anthropologists are concerned with ethnocentrism because of its many consequences. As previously mentioned, ethnocentric beliefs can result in a lack of consideration, appreciation, and respect for other cultural beliefs. Unfortunately, this lack of respect can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

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