

# 3

## Religion and prejudice

### 3.1

### What is prejudice?

#### Introduction

**Prejudice** means to 'pre-judge' someone unfairly before getting to know them. It can make someone think less of people because of their race, religion, gender, age, and so on. Many prejudiced attitudes are based on **stereotyping** certain groups of people. For example, it would be stereotyping to think that all football supporters are violent.

**Discrimination** means acting on a prejudice. It can involve treating someone unfairly or preventing them from having equal chances in life. For example, it would be discrimination to refuse to give someone a job because of their religion.

**Positive discrimination** means treating people more favourably because of who or what they are.

For example, it would be positive discrimination to give wheelchair users front-row seats at a cinema. It is usually used to help people who may not have been given equal opportunities in the past, for example, deliberately employing more women or people from minority ethnic groups.

#### Why are some people prejudiced?

Most people are prejudiced about something. When people travel abroad they may be unwilling to try foreign foods because they are not used to them. Upbringing and culture play a part in whether we are willing to try new things. These are some reasons for prejudice:

- If someone does not know a group of people or understand their culture or background, it is easier to stereotype and reject them. Lack of education can lead to the ignorance that breeds prejudice. This in turn leads to fear of others who are different, in case they change the way of life people are used to.
- Fear and uncertainty about the future can encourage **scapegoating**, or blaming certain groups of people for problems in society. This can seem to justify treating them badly. For example, the Nazis persuaded people that the Jews were to blame for Germany's economic problems to justify extreme discrimination against them.



**A** Fifty years ago this man may not have been given a job because of prejudice

#### Objectives

Introduce the meanings of prejudice, discrimination and positive discrimination.

Explore why some people are prejudiced.

Understand the effects of prejudice and discrimination.

#### links

You will consider religious teachings on prejudice on pages 58–63.

#### Key terms

**Prejudice:** thinking badly of someone because of the group he/she belongs to.

**Stereotyping:** having an over-simplified mental image of people and applying it to everyone in a group.

**Discrimination:** actions as a result of prejudice.

**Positive discrimination:** treating people more favourably because they have been discriminated against in the past.

**Scapegoating:** blaming certain groups for problems in society.

#### Research activity

Using the internet or a library, find out the original meaning of the term 'scapegoat'. How is this term used today? How might scapegoating be linked to prejudice? Make notes on key points and revise them so that you can use them in the examination.

- Children whose parents are prejudiced may grow up hearing racist or sexist comments and are likely to imitate them. Friends and neighbours may also reinforce prejudice, since most people feel comfortable around others with similar opinions. Outsiders may be regarded with suspicion.
- People may base their views of others on an expectation of what people from a particular race or religion are like. A bad experience can affect people's expectations of others. For example, if an old person was mugged by a teenager, they might then think all teenagers were thieves.
- The media is an important influence that can reinforce stereotypes, but it can also be a means of breaking them down. Some Italians may complain of being continually shown as gangsters in films. Yet some homosexuals may feel they are portrayed positively in programmes that show them as people like everyone else.
- Some people may be prejudiced against others because they themselves have been the victims of prejudice or discrimination. Their prejudice is the way they cope with being a victim.

### Effects of prejudice

Prejudice causes great harm. People can be made to feel worthless, frightened and vulnerable just for being who they are. Prejudice has caused the deaths of millions of people. During World War II, six million Jews were killed in Nazi Germany. Genocide (killing whole groups of people) has taken place more recently in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The removal of white farmers from Zimbabwe in 2000 is a type of ethnic cleansing (clearing a country of a particular ethnic group) even if it did not result in their deaths.



**C** Jews were victims of prejudice in Nazi Germany

### Discussion activity

With a partner or in a small group, discuss whether you have ever been a victim of prejudice or discrimination, or whether you know someone who has. Have you ever acted on your own prejudices? Discuss how it made you feel about yourself and the other people involved.

### Summary

You should now be able to explain the meanings of prejudice and discrimination and describe their causes, origins and effects.

### Activities

- 1** Explain, using examples, the difference between prejudice and discrimination.
- 2** Explain some of the reasons why people are prejudiced.
- 3** Give three examples of positive discrimination. Is positive discrimination fair?
- 4** Are all stereotypes negative? Give reasons for your opinion, using examples.

**B** Children can learn prejudice



**AQA Examiner's tip**  
You need to be clear about the difference between prejudice and discrimination as you may be asked to explain this in the examination.