

Class Discrimination

Authored by
mohammad looti

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Classism is prejudice and/or discrimination on the basis of social class. It includes individual attitudes and behaviors, systems of policies and practices that are set up to benefit the upper classes at the expense of the lower classes. It can also include attitudes and behavior of prejudice and discrimination by members of the lower class to members of the higher class.

Institutional versus personal classism

Just as the term racism can refer either strictly to personal bigotry or to institutional racism, the term classism can refer to personal prejudice against 'lower' classes as well as to institutional classism. The latter has been defined as "the ways in which conscious or unconscious classism is manifest in the various institutions of our society."

The term "interpersonal" is sometimes used in place of "personal" as in, "institutional classism (versus) interpersonal classism.", and terms such as "attitude" or "attitudinal" may replace "interpersonal" as contrasting with institutional classism, as in the Association of Magazine Media's definition of classism as "any attitude or institutional practice which subordinates people due to income, occupation, education and/or their economic condition."

Classism is also sometimes broken down into more than two categories, as in "personal, institutional and cultural" classism.

Terms associated with personal or attitudinal classism include "white trash", "little men" or "little people", "trailer trash," and "the unwashed masses." In earlier historical periods, classist terms and phrases as *hoi polloi* or *plebs*, which are "derogatory of the lower classes," were more commonly used than they are today.

Accusations of classism

There is disagreement over what degree modern industrialized societies are economically stratified into discernible classes. There is also often disagreement over matters of understanding, such as whether negative treatment is due to prejudice against members of certain classes, or whether the behavior is a rational reaction to actions of the person being so treated, or due to racial, ethnic, sexual, or other identity.

People who generally tend to find charges of classism against 'lower' classes to be unfounded or unreasonably harsh often characterize the perceived prejudice as expressive of classist class envy. Those who argue classism is especially pervasive or fundamental to the society that they live in often identify classism as the expression of systematic economic exploitation by the 'higher' classes, and may connect it with an explicit notion of class warfare. However, any particular accusation of classism does not, as such, presuppose any such claim, just as people may agree

on examples of overt racism, while disagreeing intensely over how widespread or deep-seated racist attitudes are in their society.

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