Speak Up or Stay Silent?

5 Reasons to Confront Prejudice

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What do you do when you see prejudice in your daily life?

Perhaps a friend uses an offensive word, a co-worker implies that people from some groups are just naturally better than others, or a family member expresses anger or fear toward another person because of the color of their skin or the way they talk. For most of us, such acts of prejudice make

us feel bad because they violate our core values—we strive to treat people in fair, equal, and unbiased ways and we get angry. upset. and frustrated when others don‘t follow this code of conduct.

But, what do you do when you see prejudice in your daily life?

Inside, you might be reading your grandmother the riot act and rolling your eyes, but outside you act as if nothing is wrong. You don't want to make waves at a holiday dinner.

After he says “I’m not racist, but... [insert racist comment here]," you write- off your supervisor, thinking there he goes again. He doesn't have a clue. You complain later to your spouse, but don't say anything in the moment because you worry that it will come back to bite you come promotion time.

Perhaps you‘re just tired of always being the one who has to remind people that words can hurt, making people feel as if they don't belong, disrespected, or invisible, so instead of speaking up, you stay silent.

If you can relate to any of these scenarios, you are not alone.

Research shows that most people believe they will stand up to prejudice—questioning the perpetrator, noting the problematic nature of the act, or exclaiming surprise. However, less than half confront when faced with an actual instance of prejudice (Swim & Hyers, 1999). Early research in this area suggested that there is good reason for the discrepancy between what people say they’ll do and what they actually do. It turns out that there are some costs to confronting. Most of them are interpersonal—confronters are not always viewed particularly positively. They are sometimes likened to complainers or trouble-makers and often regarded as mean, impolite, or aggressive (Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Swim & Hyers, 1999; Dodd, Giuliano, Boutell, & Moran, 2001).

Yet, recent research reveals 5 surprising outcomes of confronting, suggesting that you are still better off doing something rather than nothing when it comes to prejudice.

**1) It stops future instances of prejudice**. Confronting is a very effective way to get people to stop behaving in discriminatory ways. For example. In a set of studies. Alex Czopp and his colleagues (2006) asked participants to complete a task designed to elicit stereotypic responding about African Americans. When participants relied on stereotypes, they were subsequently confronted by a research assistant from the study. Compared to people who were not confronted, those who were confronted were much less likely to make stereotypic associations in the future. These effects are not just limited to perpetrators. Research also shows that witnesses' reduce their prejudice following confrontations (Rasinski & Czopp, 2010).

**2) It makes you feel better.** Confronting also increases the psychological well-being of those who are brave enough to face prejudice. Confronters tend to feel less angry and less regretful (Hyers, 2007). Rather than ruminating on what they should have done after the fact. Confronters experience more closure. People who challenge prejudice also feel more competent, have better self-esteem, and are more empowered relative to people who do not (Gervais, Hillard, & Vescio, 2010).

**3) It makes you a better person.** Not only does it make you feel better. but confronting actually makes you a better person over time. People who fail to confront, however, tend to be more prejudiced themselves over the long term (Rasinski, Geers, 8. Czopp, 2013). When people act in ways that are discrepant from their beliefs—for example, saying nothing in response to sexism even though practicing gender fairness is important to them— they feel cognitive dissonance—the uncomfortable feeling we get when we act hypocritically. When people experience cognitive dissonance, they often change their beliefs rather than their behaviors. As a result, when people fail to confront prejudice, they convince themselves that their values match their actions, and thereby their commitment to confronting prejudice in the future is reduced.

**4) It’s easier than you think.** Although images of conﬂict, opposition. And deﬁance may come to mind when you think about confronting prejudice, it turns out that people can confront in friendly ways that allow others to "save face." For example, you might make a joke conveying the problematic nature of the action or give the person an out, indicating that you’re sure they didn’t mean it in a prejudiced way, but some people might perceive the action as problematic. Although these types of friendly confrontations may seem like a cop out, it turns out that they are just as effective as more hostile confrontations (Czopp at al., 2006).

**5) Practice makes perfect.** Like any other skill, confronting can be learned and practiced. For example, elementary girls and boys who practiced confronting prejudice were more likely to effectively confront immediately following the training as well as six months later (Lamb, Bigler, Liben, & Green. 2009).

Confronting isn’t easy. Neither is being confronted. However. If we want to stop prejudice in our daily lives, feel better, and become better people. We have to do something.