

Prejudice and Discrimination

Myers (2008) describes prejudice as "a negative attitude" and discrimination as "a negative behavior" (p. 303). This description helps you to not only understand the definitions of prejudice and discrimination, but also the relationship prejudice has with your attitudes and behavior. In **Week 2**, you discussed attitudes and behaviors and how they develop. Prejudice develops in a similar way.

Sidney Poitier gave an Oscar-winning performance in the 1967 film *In the Heat of the Night* portraying a Philadelphia homicide detective. In the movie, he reluctantly assists in a murder investigation in small town in Mississippi. What this movie demonstrated (again in a fictional setting) was a clash of norms in a culture that at the time was enmeshed in change. Like any fictional movie to heighten viewers' interest, it tends to stereotype to strengthen the conflict and turmoil.

Myers (2008) defines social dominance orientation as "a motivation to have one's group dominate other social groups" and ethnocentric as "believing in the superiority of one's own ethnic and cultural group and having a corresponding disdain for other groups" (p. 312). The introduction of Virgil Tibbs (Poitier) into an environment filled with rigid cultural norms and ethnocentric thinking created a clash of personalities. What made this movie a classic was not just the strength of acting by Mr. Tibbs and the local sheriff (played by Rod Steiger), but the underlying level of prejudice and racism that permeated throughout the movie (Quart, 2008). In addition, the movie depicted strengthening of cultural norms by institutional supports as demonstrated by the actions of the sheriff's department. Finally, the movie concludes with Tibbs bringing the murderer to justice despite the obstacles put in front of him.

Myers, D. (2008). *Social psychology* (9th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Quart, L. (2008). Revisiting *In the heat of the night*. *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture*, 7(2). Retrieved from <http://logosjournal.com/2011/revisiting-in-the-heat-of-the-night/>