

# The Nature of Bias

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## 1) Definitions:

- a) **Clan:** *people group perceived according to current social norms to be similar.*
  - i) By “*according to current social norms*” is meant that perceptions of clans change over time.
  - ii) Synonyms: *association, band, brotherhood, bunch, clique, coterie, crew, crowd, crush, faction, folks, fraternity, gang, group, house, insiders, kinfolks, mob, moiety, organization, outfit, race, ring, sect, set, society, sodality, stock, tribe<sup>i</sup>*
- b) **Bias:** *an attitude that produces spontaneous assumptions about a **clan** as if that clan is one person.*
  - i) *commonly held biases (attitudes) form, dissolve and reform throughout history*
  - ii) Synonyms: *bent, bigotry, disposition, favoritism, flash, head-set\*, illiberality, inclination, inclining, intolerance, leaning, mind trip\*, mind-set\*, narrow-mindedness, one-sidedness, penchant, preconception, predilection, predisposition, preference, prejudice, prepossession, proclivity, proneness, propensity, standpoint, tendency, tilt, turn, unfairness, viewpoint*—Antonyms: *fairness, justness<sup>ii</sup> (\*informal or slang)*

## 2) The Bias Dilemma:

- a) I cannot change bias in another person.
- b) I can change my bias.
- c) I can limit the affects on me of your bias.
- d) I can only serve as a point of reference for someone else.

## 3) Purpose:

- a) Learn to identify and minimize the affects of bias by:
  - i) understanding **bias** as an attitude.
  - ii) understanding the victims of **bias**.
  - iii) understanding our role relative to **bias**.

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<sup>i</sup> clan. Thesaurus.com. Roget's New Millennium? Thesaurus, First Edition (v 1.3.1), Lexico Publishing Group, LLC. <http://thesaurus.reference.com/browse/Clan> (accessed: September 23, 2006).

<sup>ii</sup> bias. Thesaurus.com. Roget's New Millennium? Thesaurus, First Edition (v 1.3.1), Lexico Publishing Group, LLC. <http://thesaurus.reference.com/browse/bias> (accessed: September 23, 2006).

**4) Axioms:**

- a) Every person belongs to more than one **clan**.
- b) Every person, to varying degrees, is both a **receiver** and a **deliverer** of **bias**.
- c) Both **receiver** and **deliverer** are victims of **bias**.

**5) The Nature of Bias:**

- a) Bias is internal, a part of personal identity.
  - i) Bias is not a particular action.
    - (1) Actions may imply an underlying bias or may not.
  - ii) Bias is not particular words spoken.
    - (1) Words may imply an underlying bias or may not.
  - iii) PC<sup>iii</sup> language & behavior does not guarantee the absence of bias.
    - (1) PC is often a means of preserving an underlying bias.
- b) Bias is earned and learned.
  - i) Earned through stereotypical behavior.
    - (1) Media: radio, TV
  - ii) Learned by kinship with a **clan** or clans.
    - (1) Way: *"...identity processes usually occur through learning who one is not, which then necessitates a difficult, if not life-long, process in order to later receive who one is not as sister/brother."*<sup>iv</sup>
    - (2) Thiederman: *"It may not be fashionable these days to blame our parents for our family thinking, but when it comes to bias, we must lay the responsibility firmly in Mom and Dad's overburdened laps."*<sup>v</sup>
- c) Bias is welcome (feels right)
  - i) Bias makes others predictable
    - (1) Safety
    - (2) Relationships
    - (3) Organization

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<sup>iii</sup> Politically Correct

<sup>iv</sup> Way, Peggy. Created by God: Pastoral Care For All God's People. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005.

<sup>v</sup> Thiederman, Sondra. Making Diversity Work: Seven Steps for Defeating Bias in the Workplace. Chicago, IL: Dearborne Trade Publishing, 2003, 38

- d) Bias relies on unfamiliarity
  - i) “Them folks out there.”
  - ii) “You know how they are.”
- e) Bias is the baker of half a loaf living situations.
  - i) Half a loaf is not better than none when the giving of half a loaf drives the other half further into the distance. King: “...asking [one] to accept half the loaf and to pay for that half by waiting willingly for the other half...”<sup>vi</sup>
    - (1) Family
    - (2) Employment
    - (3) Faith community
- f) Bias spreads like a virus.
  - i) People are infected by repeated, compounding exposure.
- g) Bias is both complementary & critical
  - i) So-called positive biases often hide an accompanying negative bias.
- h) Bias is deafening.
  - i) “loud enough to cause (temporary) hearing loss”<sup>vii</sup>
- i) Early bias may later be internalized as shame.
  - i) One’s own identity may be formed by learning not to be you.
    - (1) Way: “identity processes usually occur through learning who one is not”<sup>viii</sup>
  - ii) Generates a mandate for “passing.”
    - (1) Kroeger: “it is passing when people effectively present themselves as other than who they understand themselves to be”<sup>ix</sup>
  - iii) Destroys confidence.
    - (1) King: “...when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of ‘nobodiness’—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.”<sup>x</sup>

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<sup>vi</sup> King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Why We Can’t Wait*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1964, 128

<sup>vii</sup> deafening. Dictionary.com. *WordNet® 2.0*, Princeton University.  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=deafening&r=5> (accessed: September 23, 2006).

<sup>viii</sup> Way, Peggy. *Created by God: Pastoral Care For All God’s People*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005.

<sup>ix</sup> Kroeger, Brooke. *Passing: When People Can’t be Who They Are*. New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2003

<sup>x</sup> King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Why We Can’t Wait*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1964, 82

- (2) Apiah: *“It’s a case where the identity you think of as your identity carries a cost that it ought not carry.”*<sup>xi</sup>
- (3) Edelman: *“So here I am: I look like a woman, act like a man, and underneath it all still feel like a child, constantly looking for someone to assure me I’m competent enough, attractive enough, good enough as I am.”*<sup>xii</sup>

iv) Produces a moral/ethical dilemma.

- (1) Apiah... *“ethical anxiety” is about presenting yourself falsely. “moral anxiety” is “about lying.” ... “Lying is troubling because it is about betraying others, and inauthenticity is troubling because it is about betraying the self.”*<sup>xiii</sup>
- (2) Goffman... *“spoiled identity” ... “By disclosing voluntarily, he writes, the passer transforms himself radically from an ‘individual with an uneasy social situation to manage, from that of a discreditable person to that of a discredited one.’ In this case, being ‘discredited’ is on the credit side...But the passer who discloses voluntarily moves beyond passing and ‘unlearns concealment.’ This phase of the moral career, Goffman writes, is the ‘final mature, well-adjusted one—a statue of grace...’*<sup>xiv</sup>

v) Mandates shallow relationships.

- (1) Apiah... *“If you’re never planning to tell your friends something, isn’t there something un-friendlike about that?”*<sup>xv</sup>
- (2) Goffman, *“...with selective confessions the passer ‘retains his standing as someone who relates horribly.’*<sup>xvi</sup>

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<sup>xi</sup> ... from interview of Anthony Apiah by: Kroeger, Brooke. *Passing: When People Can’t be Who They Are*. New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2003, 133

<sup>xii</sup> Edelman, Hope. *Motherless Daughters: A Legacy of Loss*. New York, NY: a Delta Book, Dell Publishing, a division of Doubleday Publishing Group, Inc., 1994

<sup>xiii</sup> ...from interview of Anthony Apiah by: Kroeger, Brooke. *Passing: When People Can’t be Who They Are*. New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2003, 75

<sup>xiv</sup> Goffman, Ervin. *Stigma: Notes on the management of Spoiled Identity*. New York, NY: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1963, 122, 137, 138

<sup>xv</sup> ...from interview of Anthony Apiah by: Kroeger, Brooke. *Passing: When People Can’t be Who They Are*. New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2003, 22

<sup>xvi</sup> Goffman, Ervin. *Stigma: Notes on the management of Spoiled Identity*. New York, NY: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1963, 100, 101