

Faith Giebe

Dr. Austin

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Discrimination and Distinction: The Difference in These Differences

Throughout the world, everybody has things about them that make them different. Whether it's smaller attributes like hair color to larger things like socioeconomic status, no two people are exactly the same. Throughout the entirety of our class, we focused on five key differences between people, and we discussed how these differences are cause for inequality and discrimination. These five factors include class inequality, political inequality, sex inequality, sexual orientation inequality, and race. Although these are not the only five sources of discrimination in the world today, these are five primary attributes that cause many to act discriminatory towards others. With that in mind, some inequalities are not discriminatory, such as certain distinctions of people like the elderly, children, celebrities, and criminals. These types of inequality cannot be deemed discriminatory due to their protective matter: We are treating these people differently for their own good or for the betterment of society. The main difference between a discriminatory inequality and a distinguishing inequality is that discrimination results in unfair treatment or a lack of equal access to opportunity based on certain social or economic factors, while distinguishing groups of people leads to not being given the same advantages as others.

To further elaborate on the definition of discriminatory inequalities, these factors are based on circumstances that lead to unfair access to opportunities, success, and treatment. This can be easily identified when discussing class inequality, which is something that many other forms of inequality tend to base themselves upon. An example of this class inequality is present in the Hurricane Katrina Crisis, where the government issued a mandatory evacuation; however, 28%

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of the population was below the poverty line and, therefore, stranded with no means of escaping. Multiple types of discriminatory behavior could be identified within this crisis alone: People trying to escape were turned away due to racist stereotypes, the hospital was only giving care to select people, and a massively clear lack of effort on behalf of the federal government. Many argue that the response to the hurricane would have been different if the location in trouble was home to middle-class white families, and it is difficult to disagree, for New Orleans is home to many impoverished minorities. The article Hurricane Katrina Crisis, 2005, states, "There's military right here in New Orleans, but for three days they weren't even mobilized. You'd think this was a Third World country" (Rahim 626). With comparison to a Third World country, it is clear how the federal government viewed this situation- This area is primarily filled with lower-class people, so it isn't worth wasting resources. This is just one of the many examples of class discrimination in America and how it is not only unfair but dangerous and systemic.

When thinking about the non-discriminatory distinctions that people may make between people, it may be difficult to hear that some inequalities are good. One specific example is criminals: Although it is technically an inequality that registered sex offenders aren't allowed to be within a certain radius of a school, working with children, etc., it would be difficult to disagree that this is not a justifiable inequality. These rules are set to keep children safe based on somebody's past actions, not a stereotype based on something such as race or gender. Their previous actions were bad, and it is reason enough to place a few rules upon them to protect society as a whole. This can also apply to people put on prohibition or house arrest: They aren't being discriminated against, but they are experiencing inequality based on what they can and cannot do. Another

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example of this can be identified through celebrities. Celebrities are treated differently without a doubt; however, it is nowhere near discriminatory. They are showered with gifts, free meals, security guards, and more due to their socioeconomic status. The way that they are treated differently is not discrimination, for it does not hinder the person's access or opportunities to success: It is simply a distinction of people that changes the way that they experience life. These distinctions are inequalities, but they cannot be defined as discriminatory. This is because they are not unfair preventions of access to success or mobility, but they are inequalities put in place for a reason to block them from accessing certain advantages that others can.

Overall, inequalities are impossible to escape, whether they're discriminatory or not. The key to avoiding it, though, is to maintain awareness of when it is or is not okay to treat people differently. Discrimination and distinction sound very similar with similar attributes; however, it is important to identify when it is and is not okay to treat somebody differently. When preventing somebody from access to equal opportunity due to class, political status, sex/gender, sexual orientation, or race (just to name a few), it is unacceptable to treat them differently. This is outright discrimination, and it is not justifiable. When speaking of inequalities that are solely based on a distinction, such as standing up so that a pregnant woman can have your seat on the bus, this is one of the times that it is okay to treat somebody unequally. There are justifications for many types of inequality, but being educated is the best way to be sure of whether or not it is okay.