

## "I'm not prejudiced, but ..."

5 *It is difficult to determine the extent of racial prejudice in a society; many subjective factors are involved. However, the findings of surveys suggest that, in spite of improvements, racial prejudice is not dead. — Martin Linton and Gary Younge, The Guardian Weekly, 26 March 1995, p. 13.*

An overwhelming majority of Britons believe there is widespread racial prejudice in Britain, according to an ICM poll conducted for the Guardian.

10 The poll revealed that 79 per cent of white Britons interviewed think there is prejudice towards black people — defined for the purposes of the survey as those whose families originally came from the West Indies or Africa.

The figure represents only an 11 per cent drop on those asked the same question in 1983, a few years after the first riots in Brixton and Toxteth.

15 The poll is the latest in a series of surveys indicating that racism remains a significant feature of British life, leaving black Britons increasingly alienated.

A study by the Policy Studies Institute suggested that although black Britons had much in common with their white peers, both culturally and socially, "they found it difficult to lay claim to be British because they felt the majority of white Britons really believed that only white people could be British".

20 These sentiments seem to be backed by government statistics that show unemployment within the black community is twice as high as among white people. In London, 62 per cent of black men aged between 16 and 24 are unemployed, compared with 20 per cent of white men in that age group.

25 Patterns of prejudice are spread fairly evenly among regions and social classes, although the poll findings indicate that the person most likely to harbour racial prejudices would be a retired, male, Tory skilled worker living in the Midlands.

The notion that manual workers are more prejudiced than the middle classes receives no support at all. The proportion is 19 per cent among AB professionals and managerials, C I clericals, and C2 skilled manuals. It falls to 18 per cent among the DE unskilled or unemployed.

30 But men are much more likely to describe themselves as prejudiced than women, as are Conservatives rather than Labour supporters, and people aged more than 65, rather than younger people.

35 The strong age profile of prejudice is perhaps the most hopeful indication that the "era of racial intolerance" marked by Enoch Powell in 1968 is drawing to a close.

While more than a quarter of retired people described themselves as prejudiced, less than half as many 18- to 24-year-olds described themselves in the same way.

Predictably, very few people are prepared to accept that they themselves are prejudiced. Only 3 per cent admit to being "very prejudiced" and 16 per cent to being

40 "a little prejudiced" towards all other races.

But the picture changes when the question is switched from asking how "you yourself" feel about people of other races to how "people in your street" feel.

The number of those who are "very prejudiced" leaps from 3 per cent to 6 per cent and the number who are "a little prejudiced" jumps from 16 per cent to 22 per cent. This survey uses a technique developed by British Social Attitudes in Britain and by Professor Paul Sniderman in the United States, of asking how people think their neighbours feel as a better way of gauging attitudes towards race.

45 Although it is possible for individuals to answer truthfully that people in their street are prejudiced and they are not, it clearly cannot be true if everyone says it.

50 In the ICM survey there is an incompatibility between the claim made by 77 per cent of those polled that they are "not prejudiced at all" and the claims by 28 per cent that their neighbours are "prejudiced".

When the "don't knows" are discounted, the contrast is even starker. Of those with an opinion, 41 per cent think people in their street are prejudiced but only 19 per cent think they are.

## Vocabulary

**poll** (n.): an attempt to find out the general opinion about s.th. by questioning a number of people chosen by chance - **peer** (n.): a person of the same age, class or position as one-self - **to harbour** (v.): to keep in the mind, often secretly - **Tory** (adj.): supporting the Conservative political party - **professional** (n.): a highly-trained person in a well-paid job (e.g. a lawyer or a doctor) - **clerical** (n.): an office-worker - **skilled manual** (n.): a trained person working mainly with their hands - **profile** (n.): a feature of statistical information caused by a particular factor - **to discount** (v.): to regard as untrue or unimportant

## Explanations

ICM: an organization which finds out people's opinions - AB professionals ... unemployed: Market researchers and sociologists divide people into different groups according to spending power, cultural habits, etc. They range from groups A to E.

1 Often people deny their real prejudices. Try to devise one or more test questions which would reveal a prejudice (e.g. about race, colour, sex, age, etc.).

## Comprehension

- 2 Why do black people find it difficult to feel British?
- 3 What does the survey reveal about who is most likely to be prejudiced?
- 4 What evidence is offered by statistics that there really is prejudice?
- 5 What hopeful signs does the survey reveal?
- 6 What method was used in the survey to try to find out about prejudices people were reluctant to admit?



7 Explain the arguments used in the text to suggest that the indirect method of questioning devised by Prof. Sniderman is a more accurate way of gauging prejudice.

## Opinion

- 8 Do you think black people can be British, or German?
- 9 Some people say that everyone is prejudiced, and that the first step towards overcoming one's prejudice is to admit it's there. Discuss this in the light of what Linford Christie says below.
- 10 Suggest practical ways in which prejudices might be reduced or eliminated.

## Racism - Nature or Nurture?

*The sprinter Linford Christie was born in Jamaica in 1960. In 1967 he came to Britain to join his parents, who had immigrated to find work. Christie went on to win a gold medal, for Britain in the 100m at the 1992 Olympics. In his autobiography, To Be Honest With You (London: Michael Joseph, 1995), he describes how he discovered racism:*

The fact that I was a black kid meant nothing to me. I never knew the difference between being black or anything else until I went to a school which, ironically, backed on to the old White City athletics track. Children can be so vicious. A group of them were messing around, chasing one another, when I decided to join in. I caught this girl and she said I couldn't play. When I asked why not, she replied, "My mummy said I shouldn't play with blackies." I thought, "I'm black!" I was only about eight years old but to this day, I can still hear her voice and remember exactly what she said.



*"I'm sorry – we were really looking for someone who can't fly."*