UNDERSTANDING HUMAN DIFFERENCES: MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION FOR A DIVERSE AMERICA

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Understanding Prejudice and Its Causes

"It is so much easier to assume than to prove; it is so much less painful to believe than to doubt; there is such a charm in the repose of prejudice, when no discordant voice jars upon the harmony of belief."

W.E.H. Lecky (1838–1903)

Prejudice is an attitude; it is not an action. Whether you are looking at definitions in a dictionary or reading scholarly writing, you will inevitably encounter puzzling uses of the term prejudice. Some sources suggest that prejudice involves a hatred of others, but hatred is bigotry. Based on their study of world cultures, anthropologists have argued that people everywhere in the world have prejudices, yet they do not claim that hatred—or bigotry—is widespread.

Confusion in our language is caused by a definition that suggests prejudice is synonymous with bigotry. That is why many of us deny we are prejudiced: A bigot hates, and we are certain we don’t hate anyone. In addition, we deny the pervasiveness of prejudice because we don’t observe widespread hatred in the world; thus, confusing prejudice with bigotry creates misunderstanding about the nature and extent of prejudice.

Conceptions and Misconceptions of Prejudice

What are examples of misconceptions about prejudice?

We confuse prejudice with bias, stereotypes, and bigotry. As defined in Chapter 1, bias is a mildly positive or negative feeling about someone or something; and to stereotype is to associate positive or negative traits with a group of people. Prejudice is a stronger feeling, but it is always negative, and it always refers to a group of people. Prejudice predisposes us to behave negatively toward certain others because of a group to which they belong. And when prejudice reaches the intensity of hatred, it becomes bigotry.
Some dictionaries define *prejudice* as the process of forming opinions without looking at relevant facts, yet people with prejudices may examine relevant facts and simply interpret them to confirm their prejudices. Other definitions describe prejudice as being irrational, implying that those we acknowledge as rational could not possibly be prejudiced. The problem here is that rational people also hold prejudices; we know this from reading what they wrote. Aristotle claimed that a woman was an inferior man. Abraham Lincoln believed black people were intellectually inferior to white people. Carroll (2001) quoted Martin Luther warning German Christians, “do not doubt that next to the devil you have no enemy more cruel, more venomous and virulent, than a true Jew” (p. 368). However, their prejudices did not deter any of these men from achieving significant improvements in human rights.

It is easy to smile at ancient racist or sexist attitudes and to denounce past prejudices as absurd, yet often we do not recognize current widespread prejudices that future generations may find just as absurd. In fifty or one hundred years, what will people think about the programs for the poor in the United States today? Or how people with disabilities were so often isolated or ignored? Or how gay men and lesbians were condemned by so many people?

**How widespread is prejudice?**

Although this book focuses on attitudes in the United States, prejudices are not limited to one country or one race. People living in nations around the world possess negative attitudes toward others within their own borders or close to them. Prejudices have been ignored, promoted, or tolerated, but rarely challenged. When prejudice has been challenged, the case often has become a *cause célèbre*, as when Emile Zola published “J’accuse,” an essay denouncing anti-Semitism in France’s prosecution of Alfred Dreyfus for treason (Bredin, 1986). Persistence of prejudice was illustrated by Jean Paul Sartre’s 1945 description of French anti-Semitic attitudes as Jews returned to France following World War II, even though French people were aware of Nazi concentration camps and of the genocide against the Jews (1976).

Today, nations around the world are being forced to confront historic prejudices because of economic globalization and population migrations that have created major demographic changes. Some responses to immigration have revealed the persistence of historic prejudices. In the opening paragraph of their book on prejudice and discrimination, Simpson and Yinger (1985) describe this phenomenon:

> Western European nations discovered that “guest workers,” whom they have employed by the millions, are something more than cogs in an economic machine.

And, for example,

> England, with a steady migration of people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, and the West Indies, found herself faced with problems of a color bar and passed an unprecedented law limiting immigration. Pressures against persons of Indian descent in the new nations of East Africa not only reshaped intergroup relations in those lands but influenced Britain’s restrictive immigration policy. . . . (Russia) not only struggles with questions of equity and control of her own racial and cultural minorities but finds that her ancient fear of
the “Mongol hordes,” now the Chinese, intrudes into international relations. (p. 3)

As long as people lived in relative isolation from others, prejudice against those who were far away was not necessarily harmful. In a global economy requiring functional and respectful relationships between nations, prejudice can be a destructive force both in the world and in individual societies, especially diverse societies (Gioseffi, 1993). Despite its pervasiveness, prejudice may or may not be acted upon. It is not inevitable that we must be controlled by our prejudices; those who can identify their stereotypes and prejudices may choose to control them. Education can confront such negative attitudes both in the media and in our language to help students unlearn prejudices they have been taught, and also understand why it is in everyone’s best interest not to act on prejudices. The basis of our hope for a better America and a more peaceful world is for teachers to make such a commitment and to fulfill it in their classrooms.

**How are prejudices reflected in American media and language?**

To understand how prejudices are transmitted in our culture, we need only observe some of the prevalent images of racial or cultural groups in society. As Giroux (1998) said:

> My concern with such representations . . . lies not in deciding whether they are “good” or “bad” but in analyzing them in relation to the pedagogical work they are doing. That is, what knowledge, values, and pleasures do such representations invite or exclude? (p. 27)

Look for magazine advertisements that depict Native Americans, Asian Americans, or Hispanic Americans. Why is it that most advertisements seem to use African American models to reflect diversity? If people of color are included in advertisements, why are they often featured in ways that reflect historic stereotypes? Native Americans are almost never portrayed as contemporary people but
as nineteenth century warriors; Asian Americans are often shown working at computers or in math-related professions; Mexican Americans are presented as gardeners or servants. Problems of omission and stereotyping affect other groups as well: People with disabilities are invisible, blue-collar workers are usually stereotyped, if they appear at all, and women appear frequently in advertisements as sex objects to sell products. Still, we typically don’t recognize these advertisements as stereotypes because these images are so familiar that they seem not to be stereotypes at all, but rather to portray reality. This is one reason so many white Americans do not understand why Native Americans find offensive the use of Indian mascots for sports teams.

Negative perceptions are also embedded in everyday language. When people negotiate the price of a product they might say they “Jewed him down” on the price. Parents and teachers have been overheard telling children to stop behaving “like a bunch of wild Indians.” Boys are regularly ridiculed by comments such as “he throws like a girl” or “he’s a sissy.” And then there are jokes, many of which are based on racial, ethnic, gender, or other prejudices. When we complain that some jokes aren’t funny, we are likely to be told we don’t have a sense of humor: “It was a joke!” Just a joke.

Chapter 4 will focus on the issue of how prejudices are learned, but in this chapter we are trying to understand what prejudice is and how it influences behavior. The influence is always negative because prejudice is always negative.

Why can’t prejudice be positive?

Some people misuse the term prejudice by saying they are prejudiced for something, but a prejudice is a negative attitude. A milder attitude of liking or disliking anything or anyone is a bias; however, the concept of prejudice involves learning to fear, mistrust, and strengthen stereotypes we have been taught about other groups of people. Once we learn to be prejudiced against a certain group, we tend to behave in negative ways toward others who appear to be members of that group. Negative behavior is discrimination: We no longer merely hold a negative attitude—we have acted upon that attitude.

CONSEQUENCES AND CAUSES OF PREJUDICE

With regard to discriminatory actions, Allport (1979) identified five negative behaviors caused by prejudice: (1) verbal abuse against others occurring among friends or resulting in name-calling directed at others from a particular group. Name-calling can escalate into (2) physical assaults. The victim doesn’t even have to be a member of the despised group to be assaulted; anyone could be a victim by being perceived as one of “them.” When a large group of ethnic Hmong from Southeast Asia settled in a Wisconsin community of 50,000 people, some local citizens did not accept them. A Japanese foreign exchange student who attended a college in that community was severely beaten by a white male in the mistaken belief that his victim was Hmong. Another common example of violence based on misperceptions is that heterosexual men have been physically assaulted because they were perceived to be gay.

When prejudice reaches its most extreme form, bigotry, behavior promoted by hatred can include (3) an urge to kill certain “others.” Acting on one’s hatred can lead to behavior that today we call a “hate crime.” In 1982, two Detroit men lost their jobs at an automobile factory and believed it was due to the popularity of imported Japanese cars. When they encountered Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, they mistakenly thought he was Japanese. Motivated by hatred and rage, they brutally murdered him. If homicidal rage spreads, it might lead to genocide—the systematic and deliberate extermination of a nationality or a racial or ethnic group (Feagin and Feagin, 1996).

Bigotry is required for people in power to attempt the extreme act of genocide, but prejudice
may give bystanders a reason to ignore such actions. Anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany was a major factor contributing to the Nazi extermination of six million Jews during the Holocaust. Before and during World War II, most Germans (also Poles, Austrians, and others) did nothing to protest or interfere with the death camps. After the war, they claimed they didn’t know what was going on; persuasive evidence has been gathered to refute their claim (Goldhagen, 1996).
In contrast to confrontational negative behavior stemming from prejudice and bigotry, a more passive negative response to prejudice is to avoid members of other groups. We do this by limiting our interactions with people from racial or ethnic groups other than our own. Measuring attitudes about avoiding others was the focus of research by Bogardus; this study used a Social Distance Scale in which people encounter a list of racial, ethnic, and religious groups and are asked to rank them in order of preference (Schaefler, 2004). People consistently reveal a preference for those groups most like themselves, and they have less regard for people from groups they perceive as least like themselves.

Another way to avoid certain groups is to engage in or condone discrimination in such areas as education, employment, and housing. To illustrate this behavior, consider how people choose what sort of neighborhood they want to live in. In the 1960s, when courts ordered urban school districts to desegregate, many school administrators responded by busing students to different schools, a controversial solution that caused massive movement of white families from urban neighborhoods to racially segregated suburbs, the white flight phenomenon. Despite the passage of the 1968 National Fair Housing Act, studies have documented the preference of most white Americans to live in racially segregated neighborhoods (Massey, 2001; Farley, 2000). As Massey noted, the Fair Housing Act “theoretically put an end to housing discrimination; however, residential segregation proved to be remarkably persistent” (p. 424).

What factors promote the development of prejudice?

Considerable research has been conducted addressing the question of how individuals become prejudiced. Some studies suggest that elitist attitudes foster prejudice. Elitism is the belief that the most able people succeed in society and form a natural aristocracy while the least able enjoy the least success because they are flawed in some way or lack the necessary qualities to be successful. This condescending attitude promotes the belief that those in the lower levels of society deserve to be where they are and that successful people have earned their place in society. Unsuccessful people are often held responsible for their failure. Elitist attitudes are a major factor in studies based on social dominance theory (Howard, 1999; Stephan, 1999).

The eugenics movement beginning in the late 1800s argued that an individual’s genetic inheritance determined his or her fate and that environment played little or no role in human development (Selden, 1999). Based on this argument, proponents of the eugenics movement in the United States were promoting elitist attitudes. Selden quoted American biologist George W. Hunter, author of several biology textbooks widely used in schools between 1914–1941, who expressed this elitist attitude clearly:

Those of low grade intelligence would do little better under the most favorable conditions possible, while those of superior intelligence will make good no matter what handicaps they are given. (p. 75)

Other studies suggest a link between prejudice and attitudes about power. Some people express a zero-sum attitude, a highly competitive orientation toward power based on the assumption that the personal gains of one individual mean a loss for someone else; therefore, to share power is regarded as having less power. According to Levin and Levin (1982), an individual with a zero-sum orientation toward power tends to be a person with strong prejudices. Thurow (1980) has described the adverse consequences for society when a zero-sum orientation is prevalent. Studies also suggest that people with authoritarian personalities tend to be more prejudiced, although other studies refute the idea (Farley, 2000). Some have even proposed that prejudice is innate, but there are no scientific studies to support that claim.

To be as pervasive and persistent as it has been, prejudice must serve some purpose and offer some benefit to individuals or to society. Having reviewed
research concerning causes of prejudice, Levin and Levin (1982) identified four primary causes, and within these causes, functions of prejudice that sustain it. The four causes include (1) personal frustration, (2) uncertainty about a person based on lack of knowledge or experience about the group to which they belong, (3) threat to one's self-esteem, and (4) competition among individuals in our society to achieve their goals in relation to status, wealth, and power.

How does frustration cause prejudice?

The frustration-aggression hypothesis maintains that as frustration builds, it leads to aggressive action. Frustration causes tension to increase until a person chooses to act upon the frustration to alleviate the tension. Jones (1997) and others have called this the “scapegoat phenomenon.” The word scapegoat derives from an ancient Hebrew custom described in Leviticus 16: 20–22, where each year the Hebrew people reflected on their sins during days of atonement. At the end of that time, a spiritual leader would stand before them with a goat, lay his hands on the goat’s head, and recite a list of the people’s sins, transferring the sins of the people to the goat—which was then set free. In modern America, the term generally refers to blaming a person or group for problems they did not cause.

When we take aggressive action—from verbal abuse to physical violence—we inevitably cause harm to others. Since most individuals define themselves as “good” according to some criteria, they will usually find a way to rationalize their actions as being good or at least justified. When Southerners lynched black people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they justified their actions by insisting that all blacks were lazy, lustful, or liars. Using the Kafkaesque reasoning that all blacks were guilty and therefore it didn’t matter what crime a black person was accused of committing, they executed victims with no regard for whether that specific black person was guilty of a crime.

Ironically, data from some studies have shown that aggressive action may not alleviate frustration, but instead may exacerbate it. In one study, two groups of subjects were asked to allow medical technicians to take physical measurements of their bodies. After taking the measurements, the technicians made derogatory comments intended to make the subjects angry. One group was taken to the technician’s “supervisor” if they wanted to complain; the other group was not. The researchers thought that members of the group being allowed to “vent” their anger would feel less hostile toward the technician afterwards, yet those who complained reported stronger feelings of hostility than the subjects who were not allowed to complain (Aronson, 1999). The findings suggest that identifying a scapegoat upon which to vent one’s frustration does not solve a person’s problems, and it may make matters worse.

The implication that finding a scapegoat does not solve problems is illustrated in domestic abuse cases. When a man takes out his frustrations by abusing his partner, he has to justify his actions. It is common for men arrested for domestic abuse to explain their behavior by saying, “She made me do it,” or “She kept nagging and wouldn’t shut up.” This not only depicts the man as a victim (the suffering husband), but also it reinforces the stereotype of nagging wives, providing the husband with an excuse for assaulting the woman he once claimed to love. Because violence escalates with each domestic abuse complaint from the same home, it is obvious that blaming one’s spouse or partner doesn’t solve the problem; it may possibly cause the abuser to become more violent toward those interfering with his actions.

Because of the high rates of injury and death to police officers responding to domestic abuse cases, many American cities, counties, and states require officers to file abuse charges directly, even over the objections of the one abused. Courts often mandate counseling for abusers to address and understand how gender prejudices and stereotypes created negative attitudes leading to abuse, and to teach abusive men effective, nonviolent strategies for managing anger. The role of gender stereotypes in contributing to domestic abuse illustrates another major cause of prejudice—uncertainty.

What do stereotypes have to do with uncertainty and how do they cause prejudice?

Most of us only have knowledge of the groups to which we belong; often we do not know much about other groups. In the United States, schools
have historically implemented curricula reflecting perspectives, contributions, and experiences of the dominant (white) group; many of our neighborhoods still tend to be segregated by race or social class. The result is that people from different racial and ethnic groups have few opportunities to learn about one another. Because of our lack of accurate information, we may believe in stereotypes as a way to convince ourselves that we know about certain groups. Our stereotypes can be reinforced by images or information contained in such media as advertisements, textbooks, and films.

When a person actually encounters individuals of a different race, ethnicity, or social class, selective perception of the behaviors of those individuals often reinforces his or her stereotypes. Stephan (1999) reported on one study where subjects were presented with equal amounts of positive and negative information about a group to which they belonged (in-group) and a group to which they did not belong (out-group). Subjects tended to recall more positive information about the in-group and more negative information about the out-group. According to Stephan,
negative attitudes in our memory tend to increase over time.

Selective perception was illustrated in another study where two groups of subjects viewed consecutive videotapes: The first videotape was of a fourth-grade girl playing with friends, and the second videotape was of the same girl taking an oral test in school where she answered some difficult questions correctly, but missed some easy questions. Although the second videotape was the same for both groups, the first videotape shown to one group was the girl playing in a low-income neighborhood and first videotape shown to the other group was the girl playing in a high-income neighborhood. After watching both videotapes, subjects were asked to judge the girl’s academic abilities. Those who saw her playing in the low-income neighborhood rated her academic ability lower than those who saw her playing in the more affluent neighborhood. Whether the subjects focused more on the girl’s correct or incorrect answers appeared to have been influenced by the neighborhood where they believed she lived and stereotypes associated with affluence and poverty (Aronson, 1999).

Researchers have also shown that becoming more knowledgeable about others helps people to overcome stereotypical perceptions. In a psychiatric hospital with an all-white staff, patients acting violently were either taken to a “time out room” or subjected to the harsher penalty of being put in a straitjacket and sedated. In the first month of a research study, both black and white patients were admitted. Although the black patients admitted were diagnosed as being less violent than the whites, they were four times more likely to be put in a straitjacket and sedated by the staff if they became violent. The discrepancy in the white staff’s use of restraints suggests that they believed in the stereotype that black people were more prone to violence. As the staff became better acquainted with the patients, the staff responded to violent incidents with more equal use of restraints for both black and white patients (Aronson, 1999). Stereotypes that portray a group as being prone to violence, lazy, or less intelligent can influence a person’s behavior; stereotypes can also play a part in a person’s self-esteem being threatened, which is another major cause of prejudice identified in research.

How does threat to self-esteem cause prejudice?

In the United States, people are encouraged to develop self-esteem by comparing themselves with others. We do so by grades in school, music contests, debates in speech, and athletic competitions. But what happens when positive self-esteem is achieved by developing feelings of superiority to someone else? Or when we achieve our sense of superiority by projecting our feelings of inferiority onto another person or group? If we believe in the innate superiority of our group compared to other groups, then we believe we are better than anyone who is a member of the inferior group. If members of an inferior group become successful, their achievements threaten those whose self-esteem was based on feelings of group superiority and unconsciously transforms a condescending attitude into prejudice.

People of color confront the issue of self-esteem based on race as a cause of prejudice when they encounter white people whose self-esteem is threatened by their achievements or success. The first African American to teach at Harvard University Law School commented:

> You have to simultaneously function on a high level and try not to upset those whose racial equilibrium is thrown off when they recognize that you are not incompetent, not mediocre, and don’t fit the long accepted notions about persons of color that serve as unrecognized but important components of their self-esteem. (Bell, 2002, pp. 66–67)

When we possess this kind of self-esteem, we are insecure and easily threatened. Coleman (1997) argued that people perceiving others as inferior “are more likely to identify and maintain negative stereotypes about members of stigmatized groups” (p. 222).
Studies suggest that part of the self-esteem for many men derives just from being male. In Michigan, over a thousand children wrote essays about what their lives would be like if they were the opposite gender. Although almost half the girls found many positive things to say about being male, 95% of the boys could find nothing positive to say about being female (Sadker and Sadker, 1994). Similar attitudes appear among adults. In their research on self-esteem, Martinez and Dukes (1991) reported that males displayed higher self-esteem than did females, and that white males had the highest self-esteem of all groups.

When male self-esteem derives from perceiving one’s gender as superior, it is easily threatened by women’s achievements. American men often rationalize female achievements by attributing women’s success to reasons other than competence. Their rationalizations may be characterized by resentment or anger, which intensifies the prejudice that created the initial illusion of superiority. If a woman receives the promotion a man wanted, he might complain that she is “sleeping her way to the top.” Since self-esteem based on a belief in gender superiority is an illusion, it is ultimately inadequate because the individual has done nothing to earn it. Fearing that an “inferior” person might receive rewards the “superior” individual desires is related to the fourth primary cause of prejudice: competition for status, wealth, and power.

How does competition for status, wealth, and power cause prejudice?

There is evidence that competition fosters prejudicial attitudes. Jones (1997) described a study at a summer camp where Boy Scouts were given time to become acquainted and to develop friendships before being divided into two groups and housed in separate bunkhouses. The groups were divided so that approximately two-thirds of each boy’s friends were in the other bunkhouse. The two groups were encouraged to play a series of competitive games such as tug-of-war, football, and baseball. Boys who had liked each other began to intensely dislike each other and to engage in name-calling. Although there was solidarity within groups, friendships that had been established with boys from the other group no longer existed. After competitive games were concluded, researchers brought the boys together, but animosity remained until the boys were given tasks that required them to cooperate with each other. Working together to achieve a common goal reduced the hostility and resulted in the boys again making friendships with individuals from the other group.

The Perpetuation of Prejudice

People want to be successful and will try to promote their own self-interests. When members of one group believe that individuals from another group are becoming more successful than they are, they may become angry at those individuals—even hostile toward the entire group—by rationalizing an advantage other than talent or skill that is responsible for their success. White American males sometimes resent affirmative action because they believe it provides women and racial or ethnic minorities an advantage in being hired and promoted. Resentment from economic competition for good jobs with high salaries and status fosters prejudice. Since humans are intelligent enough to identify these various causes of prejudice, it seems logical to assume that people should be able to recognize that they have prejudices and attempt to eliminate them.

How are prejudices perpetuated?

A major factor in the perpetuation of prejudice is the tendency to rationalize prejudices and the negative behaviors prejudices promote. As Gioseffi (1993) has noted, “Just as individuals will rationalize their hostile behaviors . . . so nations do also” (p. xvii). Vega (1978) described rationalizations taking three forms: denial, victim-blaming, and avoidance. To unlearn our prejudices and develop effective ways of confronting prejudices expressed by others, we need to recognize these rationalizations so we can make an appropriate response when they are expressed.
Denial rationalizations

In making denial rationalizations, we refuse to recognize that there are problems in our society resulting from prejudices and discrimination. Such claims are astonishing in their ignorance, yet they continue to be made. In response to assertions of racism, the most common denial rationalization is the reverse discrimination argument that claims that women and minorities receive the best jobs because of affirmative action programs. Is there any truth to this claim?

According to population demographics, women now comprise almost half of the workforce; another 10% consists of males of color, which means that white males constitute about 40% of the workforce (Daft, 2003). A job paying an annual salary of $50,000 or more is a criterion to identify which jobs involve some degree of authority, status, and decision-making power. How many of these jobs are in the hands of white males? It would be consistent with their proportion of the workforce if white males had slightly less than half of these jobs, yet according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001), white males hold over three-fourths of these positions, about twice as many as the percent of white males in the workforce. Claims that white males are unfairly discriminated against as a result of affirmative action policies would appear to be dubious (see Table 3.1).

The most common denial rationalization related to sexism is the “natural” argument, which denies gender discrimination, claiming that it is natural for women to do some things better than men, and for men to do some things better than women. This denial rationalization is offered as an explanation for why men and women have historically held certain types of jobs. The argument does not explain the difference between the skills of a tailor (predominantly men) compared to a seamstress (predominantly women) to justify the differences in their compensations. Nor does it explain why construction workers (mostly males) should be compensated at a greater rate than college educated social workers (mostly females). Historically, women have been paid less than men for doing the same work, and occupations dominated by women still receive lower wages than occupations dominated by men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001). This is the reality, but denial rationalizations have little to do with reality.

The most subtle denial rationalization is personal denial illustrated by the man who says, “How can I be sexist? I love women! I married a woman. I have daughters.” This seems a reasonable statement: Someone denying he has gender prejudices does not appear to deny the existence of widespread prejudice against women—but the statement actually does imply a more sweeping denial. Psychologically, most people feel they are normal, average

People prefer to believe what they prefer to be true.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626)

Table 3.1
Annual Incomes of Full-Time Workers in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Gender</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White males</td>
<td>$494 (100%)</td>
<td>$669 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black males</td>
<td>$361 (73.1%)</td>
<td>$503 (75.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic males</td>
<td>$318 (64.4%)</td>
<td>$414 (61.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White females</td>
<td>$353 (71.5%)</td>
<td>$500 (74.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black females</td>
<td>$308 (62.4%)</td>
<td>$429 (64.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic females</td>
<td>$278 (56.3%)</td>
<td>$364 (54.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2001)
Statistical Abstract of the United States.
people. If a person denies being prejudiced, he or she is actually denying that most other normal, average people are prejudiced as well. The real meaning of such a statement is that the speaker does not believe prejudice and discrimination are serious problems in society. If someone argues this point, the person making this denial rationalization might resort to victim-blaming responses because the two are closely related.

Victim-blaming rationalizations

People employing victim-blaming rationalizations reject the notion that prejudice and discrimination are problems in society, even though they admit that problems exist. The problems they identify, however, are typically deficiencies or flaws in members of minority groups (Ryan, 1976). Victim-blamers focus on the group being harmed by societal prejudices and insist that society doesn’t need to change: The group needs to change. Victim-blamers urge individuals to stop being so sensitive or so pushy, to work harder, and to quit complaining. Group members are told they are responsible for whatever problems they must overcome.

Victim-blaming often occurs among people who want to believe in a just world. In one study, subjects observed two people working equally hard at a task. By a random decision, researchers gave one of the workers a significant reward when the task was completed; the other worker received nothing. When asked to rate how hard the two people had worked, the subjects tended to describe the person who received nothing as not working as hard as the person receiving the reward. Aronson (1999) concluded his analysis of this study by suggesting that “we find it frightening to live in a world where people, through no fault of their own, can be deprived of what they deserve or need” (p. 299).

People who engage in victim-blaming rationalizations often go beyond blame to propose solutions. By defining the problem as a deficiency existing in the victimized group, every solution proposed by a victim-blamer involves what they need to do because they are the problem. The rest of us need do nothing. Rape is increasing on college campuses? That’s a woman’s problem, so what they need to do is to wear less provocative clothing, avoid going out late at night, and learn to defend themselves by taking martial arts classes or carrying pepper spray. What to do about the men who rape isn’t addressed. Because victim-blamers offer solutions, it is easy to confuse victim blaming with some avoidance rationalizations.

Avoidance rationalizations

Unlike denial and victim-blaming, avoidance rationalizations recognize the problems in society stemming from prejudice and discrimination. This is a significant difference from the previous rationalizations. Even though a person making avoidance rationalizations admits there are problems, he or she will not address them and will rationalize a reason to avoid them. Ways to avoid confronting issues include offering a solution that addresses only part of a problem, or suggesting a false solution that does not address the problem at all.

If college administrators decide to confront prejudice by requiring students to take an ethnic studies course, that requirement will address a small part of the problems caused by racial prejudice and discrimination. Learning more about ethnic groups is a good idea, but if colleges are serious about actively opposing racism and improving race relations, administration and faculty must recruit diverse students, hire diverse faculty, and promote cultural diversity through workshops and seminars both on campus and in the community.

A false solution that does not address the problems of sexism whatsoever is the proposal that “sexism would just disappear if we didn’t pay so much attention to it.” Problems created by sexism did not suddenly appear and they won’t disappear unless people engage in actions to confront, challenge, and change sexist attitudes, policies, and laws. The only way any society can solve problems and improve conditions is to analyze a problem, create appropriate solutions, implement the solutions that seem most likely to be effective, and, after time passes, assess the impact of these solutions.

Another form of avoidance rationalization involves making an argument that distracts from the issue or question being discussed. Imagine a group of people discussing efforts that could be made to increase social justice in our society. Suddenly someone says, “You're being too idealistic. We are never going to solve this problem because we’re never going to have a utopia.” The speaker was not arguing for the creation of a utopia, a perfect society, but for ways to improve society. By making the
reasonable statement that utopias are not possible, the speaker has shifted the focus of the conversation to a different topic that avoids the issue. It is not realistic to believe that it is possible to create a perfect society, but it is possible—in fact, essential—to believe that any society can be improved.

In a discussion about the need for child-care centers at worksites, someone might say “I support the idea, but it takes time; it’s not going to happen overnight.” A reasonable response, except if the discussion ends with that comment, what has been achieved? To implement any solution successfully, it is necessary to clarify what is entailed: What needs to be done? Who will do what? Which actions should be done next month? What can we expect in the next six months? Who will determine whether the solution is working? How will that be determined? Saying a solution takes time may be true, but it is still necessary to discuss what must be done to implement it. To avoid that discussion is to avoid the problem. Problems are not solved by talk or the passage of time, but by taking some kind of action.

**Is prejudice part of human nature?**

There is no study concluding that prejudice is an innate part of human nature. The most fundamental truth about prejudice is that it is learned. Rationalizations like the ones just described illustrate how people can resist changing their negative attitudes and perpetuate the prejudices they have learned. Some people despair of ever solving problems that result from prejudice, yet the fact that prejudice is learned offers hope: Anything that can be learned can be unlearned.

**AFTERWORD**

If prejudice were part of human nature, people would be justified in feeling despair because the implication would be that human beings eventually will destroy each other. But there is no evidence to support the idea that prejudice is innate. Instead, studies have consistently concluded that prejudice is learned. Prejudice can be reduced by the provision of accurate information, by affective educational experiences, by formal and informal learning, and by establishing equitable workplace policies and practices. Prejudices can be unlearned by good teaching and by friends challenging one another’s negative attitudes. And even though some people may not be able to give up their prejudices, they can learn how to manage them. When we can identify our prejudices and understand how we learned to be prejudiced, we can choose not to act on these prejudices.

When we make positive choices, we offer humanity the best reason to have hope for the future. It was the positive choices human beings have made throughout history that resulted in genuine human progress. If our society is to benefit from its diversity, it will be because enough Americans have chosen to regard diversity as an asset and to confront their prejudices. Those who make such positive choices today will shape the nature of the society in which our children and their children must live.
**TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Avoidance rationalization** A response to a social problem—such as injustice toward a minority group—that acknowledges the existence of a problem but avoids confronting the problem by offering partial or false solutions or by using arguments that do not address the situation as in “Yes, but you should have seen how bad it was last year.”

**Denial rationalization** A response to a social problem—such as injustice toward a minority group—that does not acknowledge the existence of a problem but insists instead that no injustice has occurred as in “That’s not discrimination, men have always been the boss; it’s just the way things are meant to be.”

**Elitism** The belief that the best people ascend to a place of superiority in society and represent a natural aristocracy, while those who are not successful are viewed as lacking the necessary qualities to be successful within society.

**Genocide** The deliberate and systematic extermination of a particular nationality, or racial, ethnic, or minority group.

**Prejudice** A negative attitude toward a group and anyone perceived to be a member of that group; a predisposition to negative behavior toward members of a group.

**Scapegoat** An individual or a group of people blamed for another person’s problems or difficulties; identifying a scapegoat is often employed to justify one’s taking a negative action against that individual or group.

**Victim-blame rationalization** A response to a social problem—such as injustice toward a minority group—that identifies the problem as a deficiency in the minority group and not a societal problem, as in “If poor people want to escape poverty they just have to be willing to work harder.”

**White flight** The migration of white families from an urban to a suburban location because of court rulings to desegregate urban schools.

**Zero sum** An orientation toward power and resources based on assumptions of scarcity, as when struggling to achieve goals, one person gains at the expense of another. The belief that sharing power means a reduction of power.

**REFERENCES**


Examines prejudice and its consequences for individuals who act on prejudice as well as those victimized by prejudice.


Presents an overview of research in social psychology and describes patterns and motives revealed in these studies concerning human behavior.


Discusses six factors that are critical in determining the quality and meaningfulness of one’s life: passion, courage, faith, relationships, role models, and humility.


Describes the historical background and the ensuing controversy surrounding this notorious example of anti-Semitism.


Analyzes statistics pertaining to the American workforce and the role and nature of the participation in that workforce by women and minorities.


Examines the history of relations between the Catholic Church and the Jews and explains the basis for the historic pattern of anti-Semitism that still exists in the church.


Discusses the origin of the concept of stigma and analyzes the reasons why some differences in human beings are valued and others are stigmatized.


Discusses diversity in the workforce and how corporate culture is accommodating diversity.


Discusses the research on authoritarian personalities in Chapter 2 (pp. 23–29) and racial segregation in U.S. neighborhoods in Chapter 10 (pp. 290–306).

Provides definitions of major terms and concepts in intergroup relations.


Contains excerpts from historic and contemporary authors from around the world describing the existence and consequences of human prejudice.


Analyzes media images, especially films, and their impact on children and youth.


Presents evidence for the controversial thesis that Germans readily collaborated in the Nazi Holocaust.


Integrates theory, research, and personal experiences to describe problems created by racism and white privilege and discusses actions to bring about positive changes.


Integrates data from psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, political science, and history to explain prejudice and racism and the relationship between them.


Examines the causes and effects of prejudice summarized on two flow charts.


Presents findings from a study of self-esteem in a multiracial population of students in grades 7–12 who attended the largest school district in Colorado Springs, Colorado.


Describes how segregation has increased in recent years, especially for blacks, as well as the nature of segregation for Hispanics and Asian Americans.


Describes and analyzes victim-blaming attitudes toward blacks in the inner cities.


Discusses how boys are favored and girls are discriminated against in schools; describes the Michigan study in Chapter 3, “The Self-Esteem Slide” on pp. 83–85.


Describes French anti-Semitism expressed after World War II despite French people’s awareness of the Nazi Holocaust.


Reviews changes in the composition of U.S. immigrants and anti-immigrant sentiments in Chapter 4: Immigration and the United States (pp. 102–131); discusses findings of research using the Social Distance Scale in Chapter 2: Prejudice (pp. 36–71).


Examines the development of the eugenics movement in the United States and what lessons should be learned from it.


Provides an in-depth examination of prejudice and discrimination, including studies that used the Social Distance Scale (pp. 94–97).


Reviews theories of prejudice and stereotyping, examines conditions to promote changes in negative attitudes, and describes techniques for improving race relations in schools.


Describes economic implications when a society accepts and acts on zero-sum thinking.

Provides historic and current statistical data on the demographics of the U.S. workforce (at the web site, look for Statistical Abstract under “Special Topics”).


Examines the history of the wage gap between men and women and analyzes the impact of such issues as age, occupation, and education.


Discusses the development of individual racist and sexist attitudes from cultural and institutional influences and measures the impact of a course on those attitudes.
Review and Discussion Activities

Summary Exercises

See page 19 for exercises to help you summarize the main points and define key terms in this chapter.

Personal Clarification Exercises

In Chapter 3, two exercises are intended to provide an honest basis for discussion of personal prejudice.

Clarification Exercise #1 Rationalization

Issues in Race and Gender: Illustrations and Explanations

Directions: In teams of two and with the aid of your text, analyze each set of rationalizations in order to learn to recognize why each illustration exemplifies the kind of rationalization with which it is placed.

Part One: In teams of two, review the examples provided for victim-blame, denial, and avoidance rationalizations. Agree with your partner about how each statement fits its placement.

Rationalizations on the Issues of Racism and Sexism: Illustrations and Examples

Denial: The denial rationalization rejects the existence of the problem. The speaker truly doesn’t recognize that there is a problem! Or the speaker may recognize that there is a problem, but denies that anything can ever be done about it by using or implying “That’s just the way things are.”

1. “When I see minorities on television, most of them are happy; they’re always singing and having a good time. I don’t think racism is a problem any more . . .”
2. “I’m fed up with all these people accusing me of being racist and sexist and all the other things and blaming me for all their problems. I’ve heard it all before and I’m tired of it. Besides, my ancestors never owned slaves. I had nothing to do with it then and I have nothing to do with it now.”
3. “We’d all be better off training these people for some useful trade, something they can more easily adapt to, instead of lowering our academic standards at our colleges and universities or hiring them for jobs without the proper qualifications.”
4. “Women are just naturally emotional and soft-hearted. They are not equipped to make the hard decisions required of people in positions of authority.”

Victim-Blame: The victim-blame rationale makes reference to a specific person or group and either directly or by implication blames that person or group for having created their own misfortune. The speaker refuses to accept responsibility for the plight, even though that person or an allied group may have been highly responsible.

1. “The problem with radical minority organizations is that they are often led by minorities who are extremists.”
2. “The problem today is that minorities and women think that everyone owes them a living.”
3. “The solution to the Indian problem is in the hands of the Indians. If they forget about the old ways and join in our modern technological society, they’ll do just fine.”
4. “What’s all this stuff about police brutality? If people break the law, they deserve whatever treatment they get.”
5. “The problem with the women’s lib movement is that it is led by a bunch of sexually frustrated, female sexists.”

Avoidance: The avoidance orientation accepts the existence of the problem but attempts to avoid it. Avoidance rationale may propose a false or inadequate solution, or make a statement that attempts to sidetrack the listener away from the real issue. The effect of this orientation is the misplacement of the problem leading to faulty or incomplete solutions focusing on victims, such as the need for more research, more law enforcement, more remedial programs.

1. Don’t you think these people have gone too far with all this sitting in, protecting law breaking, and demanding? After all, there are established procedures for people to air their grievances in our society.
2. Yes, we have a lot of problems in our society, but if we were all just good Christians, we could learn to love one another.

3. Yes, but isn’t this all part of human nature? Aren’t we all prejudiced in one way or another? And, isn’t everybody discriminated against in some way, shape, or form?

4. I have the right to like or dislike anybody I want and the First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees me the right to say so.

5. I know America has problems, but I’m proud to be American; I think you should love it or leave it.

Clarification Exercise #2 Rationalizations: Victim-Blame, Denial, and Avoidance

Directions: This exercise provides everyday statements we might hear; each one is a specific kind of rationalization. Based upon the text, the activity above, and upon your group discussion, identify the statements below according to one of the three types of rationalizations.

Part One: In teams of two, select which passages would most likely represent an avoidance of a problem. Then select those in which the speaker employs a denial rationalization—that the problem either does not exist or that the speaker is suggesting “That’s just the way things are.” Finally, locate victim-blame statements where there is a specific person or group being charged with its own downfall or problem.

Rationalizations for Our Prejudices

Directions: Decide whether the following statements represent a denial of the problem (D), a victim-blame that it is the speaker’s problem (D/VB), or an avoidance of the problem (A).

____ 1. Women and minorities are getting everything their way. They are taking away our jobs and pretty soon they are going to take over everything.

____ 2. What we have here, basically, is a failure to communicate. We must develop better programs in interpersonal communications to address this issue.

____ 3. This is the way these people want to live. You can’t change poor people; they can’t help the way they are.

____ 4. We must move with deliberation on these issues. Real change takes time. We have to educate people.

____ 5. All those women on welfare have it made. All they do is stay home and make babies while the rest of us have to work and pay taxes to support them.

____ 6. I can’t figure out what to call all these people. Why can’t we all just be human instead of black, Chicano, Latino, Native American, or Asian American?

____ 7. Indians are their own worst enemy. They should stop fighting amongst themselves and get together on whatever it is they really want.

____ 8. If blacks want to make it in our society, they are going to have to get rid of those dreadlocks and other weird hair styles, the baggy clothes, funny handshakes, and they better start speaking better English.

____ 9. Yes, but in the old days, race and sex discrimination were much worse. And even today, women and minorities are much better off in this country than anywhere else in the world.

____ 10. Women are just too sensitive about sexism. They need to look at these things less emotionally and much more rationally.

____ 11. We need more programs in African American studies, Latino studies, Native American studies, and Asian American studies to learn about all the contributions these groups have made to our society.

____ 12. Feminists are pushing too hard for the changes that they demand. They are hurting themselves more than they are helping.

____ 13. I understand that some people face more difficulties than others, but this is a free country and I believe that anybody who is willing to work hard enough can be successful.
Part Two: When you have completed this exercise and you are instructed to move ahead, compare your responses separately with those of two other teams. Explain your reasoning for each and develop extensions of the definitions provided in order to better recognize denial, victim-blame, and avoidance rationalizations.

Part Three: Select any two from each of the three categories—D, VB, and A—and rewrite them to be the fourth kind of statements—those without rationalization.

Part Four: At the appropriate time, share your revised statements with those of others within the total group. Explain why you chose to rewrite them as you did.

Intergroup Exercises
In Chapter 3, two exercises promote discussion about values and ethical behavior in modern American society.

Intergroup Exercise #1 The Liver Transplant Problem

Background: Today, the only medical procedure available to save the lives of persons suffering from diseases of the liver is an organ transplant. Unfortunately, there are not enough livers to take care of all cases now, and there will not be enough in the near future to save the lives of all those who need such an operation to survive.

Your role: The decision about which people can be saved must be made on criteria other than medical criteria. Your hospital has decided that the best way to select persons for a transplant is by setting up a volunteer citizens panel to make the decisions. You are on the panel and you receive a Profile Sheet of applicants for transplants (see below). Doctors have screened all patients already, and all have equal prognosis for medical success.

Problem: There is now one liver available for one of the persons on the list. A decision must be made quickly. All those not served are expected to die soon. The availability of other livers cannot be anticipated, although if other livers become available, additional persons on the list could receive transplants.

Directions: In a group of four to five people, identify one person from the list to receive the liver currently available. Your panel is asked to deliver a unanimous decision regarding the person to be the liver recipient. As you deliberate, discuss your values and consider those of others related to the process being utilized and the criteria that you propose.

Liver Transplant Recipient Profile Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Moslem</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Postal worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Medical Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Jew</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Episcopal</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>PhD student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Welfare Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Seasonal Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Special Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discuss within your group the following:
1. The criteria you develop for choosing the recipient.
2. Why you believe that the person you chose best fits your criteria.
3. How your panel comes to a single selection of a recipient.

Notes about recipients:
A. Devotes time to volunteer work for black organizations
B. Possible candidate for U.S. Senate
C. College physician and women’s liberation speaker
D. Active in local synagogue and charitable activities
E. Middle states chair of a gay rights task force
F. Advocate and organizer of welfare mothers
G. State chair, Indian Treaty Rights Organization
H. Blind and physically disabled
I. Cognitively disabled

Individual Exercise #1 I’m Not Prejudiced, But . . .

Directions: Read privately each of the following statements and respond as honestly as you can about whether or not you have felt, expressed, or heard within your family similar thoughts in the past. Enter your responses next the each number below. Your responses should be one of the following: S = Sometimes, O = Often, N = Never. Share those responses that you wish to discuss.

I’m Not Prejudiced, But . . .
1. If I’m in a social setting and a joke with racial overtones is told, I laugh.
2. When I’m walking on campus and I see a group of people of another race coming toward me, I feel uneasy.
3. I don’t see the point in separate ethnic courses such as Native American History, or African American Literature.
4. People who are United States citizens should not identify themselves with hyphenated names such as Asian American or Irish American. We should just be Americans.
5. Racism is not a high priority topic for me.
6. Since Asian Americans have been able to pull themselves up from hardship and discrimination, other minorities should be able to do the same.
7. I believe that minorities are responsible for their own poverty.
8. Placing too much emphasis on the ethnic and racial identity of minority students just makes race relations worse.
9. Flying a Confederate flag or having one in your dorm room should not be seen as a racist act.
10. I can see having multicultural education in urban schools, but I don’t see why they should have multicultural education in rural or suburban schools.