

funding, where he receives a poor education and thus has less chance than a wealthier white child to go to college and get a job that pays well. He is often harassed by police solely on the basis of his skin color and is at increased risk of being injured or killed by police. This young man's mistreatment is systematic and pervasive. He is experiencing oppression.

A single individual can be prejudiced or discriminate against others, but for oppression to occur, the mistreatment must be institutionalized or built into the social system in some way. Oppression does not require overt discrimination. Instead, a lack of attention to creating societal structures that meet the needs of diverse populations can result in oppressive situations. For example, when a woman who uses a wheelchair wants to apply for a job, she discovers a steep stairway at the entrance to the business. She finally finds a freight elevator at the back of the building, but the buttons are too high for her to reach. Even after someone else pushes the button, she can't make her way into the office because the doorway is too narrow to accommodate her wheelchair. Exhausted, demoralized, and not feeling welcome, she leaves without applying for the job (see Box 4.1).

LO2 The example in Box 4.1 demonstrates **institutional discrimination**, which occurs when discrimination is built into the norms and institutions in society and is enforced by those in power. Institutional discrimination exists

Box 4.1 More About...Oppression and Violence

There is a strong relationship between oppression and violence. Dominant groups often use violence or the threat of violence to retain their supremacy. For example, they can call out the police and military when members of oppressed groups threaten them. They can also use violence directly to keep nondominant groups "in their place." Lynching, gay bashing, vandalizing synagogues, burning black churches, and rape have all been used to remind members of oppressed groups of their status.

Members of oppressed groups sometimes respond to unjust treatment with violence. For example, in 2016, uprisings took place in Ferguson, Missouri; St. Paul, Minnesota; Charlotte, North Carolina; and other cities, among members of the African American community following a number of police shootings of African Americans. Gay men and lesbians noted in 1969 after a police raid on a gay bar in New York City. When people can no longer tolerate injustice, they strike out at the world around them. Often their actions do more harm to themselves than to the oppressor, such as when rioters burn their own neighborhoods. It is important to remember that reactions to injustice and oppression are often more emotional than rational. People who have reached the breaking point are "inflamed and enraged."

and "mad, angry, and bitter" (Bies & Tripp, 1996, p. 254).

The intensity of the emotion pushes them to act, sometimes without thinking about the consequences.

When most people think of violence, individual violence against people or property—such as murder, rape, and gang violence—comes to mind. This is only a small part of the violence that takes place in society (Van Soest & Bryant, 1993). Violence that is not as easy to see or identify includes institutional violence, which takes place, for example, when a large number of low-wage workers are fired while top management and stockholders are reaping the benefits of record profits. It also includes cultural violence, such as the many ways that dominant groups deny and destroy the cultures of oppressed groups. Poverty, hunger, homelessness, racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, ageism, and anti-Semitism are all forms of violence.

Many people believe that members of oppressed groups start the cycle of violence. However, members of oppressed groups are responding to cultural and institutional violence with individual violence. Although violence may not be the best response to violence, it is an understandable response. To stop the violence in society, institutional and cultural violence, as well as individual violence, must be addressed.

in the educational, health, political, social, legal, and economic systems. In fact, few areas of Americans' economic and social lives are free of institutional discrimination. It so thoroughly permeates societal institutions that people often do not recognize that it is there. Instead, Americans frequently accept the many forms of institutional discrimination as just the way things are.

For example, it is well known that public schools serving predominantly low-income children and children of color have far fewer resources than schools serving wealthier and white children and thus provide a lower standard of education. Many people do not see that the institutional discrimination built into the system of public school funding limits many children's chances to succeed. They fail to recognize the inequity involved in funding schools from property tax receipts, which provide more money in rich neighborhoods than in poor neighborhoods. People also do not see individual teachers and administrators acting in a discriminatory way. Thus, they blame the problem of undereducated children on the children and their families rather than on the unjust system of funding public schools. Box 4.2 lists additional examples of the pervasiveness of institutional discrimination in American society.

Oppression has been based on differences in race, sex, sexual orientation, economic status, physical or mental ability, age, and religion. Individuals may experience multiple forms of oppression. For example, an Asian American woman may be excluded or harmed on the basis of both her race and her sex.

This makes oppression a multifaceted and complex social condition. **Racism** is the systematic mistreatment of people based on race. Racism is institutionalized and perpetrated by members of groups who have power or control over society and its institutions. Groups experiencing racism in the

Box 4.2 What Do You Think?

Do you think that the following are examples of institutional discrimination? Why?

- Children from affluent families attend schools with better facilities, equipment, and books; and better-paid, better-trained teachers than do children from poorer families.
- While people, heterosexuals, and the able-bodied see themselves portrayed frequently and in a positive light on television, in magazines, and in the movies.
- Schoolchildren learn more about the achievements of white male historic figures than about the contributions of women and people of color.
- Private businesses are allowed to deny services to lesbians and gay men based on their religious beliefs.
- In many cities, African Americans are randomly pulled over by police and questioned and searched without cause. This practice is known as racial profiling.
- Banks employ redlining, which is the refusal to make loans to people in areas with high concentrations of certain racial groups.
- Healthy people are forced to retire at age 65.
- A qualified woman is not hired to do a demanding job because the employer thinks she might want to have children, which is perceived to limit her ability to give her full attention to her work.
- Latinos are rounded up by local police who are looking for illegal immigrants.
- Insurance companies refuse to sell health insurance to anyone living in a certain zip code because many gay men live in the area, and the risk of HIV infection is perceived to be high.

Can you think of other examples of institutional discrimination?