

technology have changed the way we communicate, how we hold our bodies, how we define and conduct relationships, and how we see and present ourselves to others (among many other changes). Technology has socialized us into new norms and practices that are not the same as those we were taught in childhood.

Because our frames are composed of the large social groups into which we are born (i.e., race, class, gender), they remain fairly stable over our lives and continually impact our adaptation to social changes. For example, if we are of a lower social class, we might not have the same access to new technology that those of the middle and upper classes take for granted, and thus we may not develop the same skill set. If we are female, subtle bias in schools may track us away from courses in advanced technology, or we may have less confidence or interest. Our frames are always impacting our lenses.

Most importantly for the purposes of understanding racism, while we remain in the racial group into which we were born, our *lenses can shift* (expand and deepen) as we reflect on our racial frames; gain new experiences, information, and self-knowledge; and practice new patterns of behavior. The goals of this book are rooted in this understanding; as we gain deeper insight into what it means to have the racial frames that we have, our perspective on race deepens, we gain a more nuanced and complex understanding, and we can begin to act in new and more equitable ways. In order to increase our racial literacy we must be able to reflect upon the whole of our cultural glasses—the lenses *and* the frames.

Chapter 4: Defining Terms

My neighborhood is pretty much dominantly white. There are some parts of my town however, that are dominantly Spanish and/or African American. Lately, my town has become much more diverse than when I was younger. The media, history, word of mouth has shown me that there is a certain sense of racism in everyone, even if it's unintentional. Although segregation is in the past, I feel as if racism will always stick. I feel like my life is not affected by race. I grew up in an accepting household and was taught to love everyone (ASR).

Once we understand the power and ongoing nature of socialization in our lives, we are ready to move on to the next fundamental building block of racial literacy: understanding the terms *prejudice*, *discrimination*, and *racism* and the key differences between them. These terms provide the overall theoretical framework for understanding what it means to be white.

In the following discussion, I am referring to social dynamics based on group memberships. In other words, we are social beings who learn to understand each other by the groups we belong to: old/young, male/female, heterosexual/gay, able bodied/person with a disability. In large part, we know what it means to be part of our own group by understanding that we are *not* a part of its opposite group. Thus when I discuss prejudice and discrimination, I am referring to social dynamics between *groups* of people. These dynamics are a function of socialization and based on a person's social group memberships in a given society. (While these terms are also used to indicate preferences such as those for food, and concepts such as "discriminating taste," this is not the context in which I use them.)

It is critical that readers understand that in speaking about patterns, I will necessarily be generalizing. There are of course exceptions to patterns, and not everyone will fit every pattern. But patterns are recognized as patterns precisely because they are recurring and predictable. One cannot understand modern forms of racism if one cannot or will not explore patterns of group behavior.

Prejudice

Prejudice is pre-judgment about another person based on the social groups to which that person belongs. Prejudice is based upon characteristics we *assume* others have due to their group memberships. We can sometimes pre-judge a person based on his or her resemblance to another individual (my neighbor is unfriendly; you remind me of my neighbor; I have an immediate dislike of you). But for the purposes of understanding racism, I will focus on prejudice that is based on the *group* to which someone belongs or is *perceived* to belong (you drive an old pick-up truck—I assume you are of a lower social class and therefore will be crude and uneducated). Prejudice is made up in large part by stereotypes that create bias or value judgments. This bias can be *toward* a group as well as against it; whether you view someone as better or as less than someone else based on a group to which they belong, you are still attributing relative value based on their group.

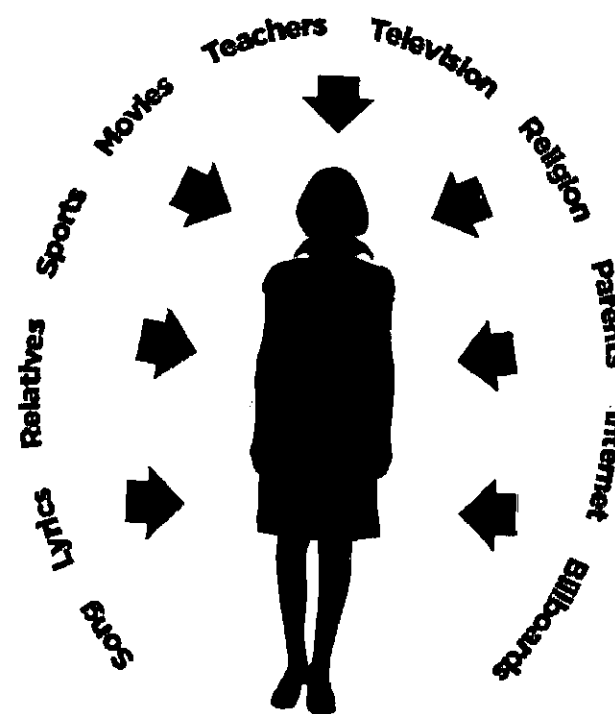
Prejudice: Learned prejudgment based on stereotypes about a social group that someone belongs to. Prejudice occurs at the individual level; all humans have learned prejudices.

Prejudice consists of thoughts, feelings, assumptions, beliefs, stereotypes, attitudes, and generalizations. The nature of prejudice is that it is based on little or no experience and then projected onto everyone from that group. For example, I have rarely interacted with people from Afghanistan, but my head is nonetheless filled with stereotypes about them, and those stereotypes will be consistent with those held by most others in my society. If I asked a group of people who also did not know any Afghani people to share the ideas they had about Afghanis, our ideas would be similar because we swim in the same cultural water and absorb the same messages.

So if we don't actually have to have any experience with a group of people in order to hold prejudices about them, where do we get our prejudice? We learn prejudice from the society around us. Anyone who grew up watching Disney movies, for example, has absorbed ideas about ethnic "others": Arabs, Native Americans, Mexicans, Asians, and so on. We learn prejudice from comments made by family members, from media, advertisements, magazines, song lyrics, television, novels, textbooks, from teachers and classmates in school. We also learn prejudice just as powerfully from the

absence of information, for example history lessons and textbooks that leave out groups such as women, people of color, and the poor and working classes. The absence of information conveys the implicit message that this group of people is not important. Figure 5 illustrates some of the sources of prejudicial messages we receive and absorb.

Figure 5: Prejudice



Prejudice

Further, we tend to focus on information that reinforces our prejudice and to disregard information that counters it. For example, if I hold a stereotype that elderly people are bad drivers, I can be cut off in traffic all day long by a wide range of different kinds of drivers, but when I am cut off by an elderly driver, I will say, "A-ha! See, elderly people are bad drivers!" The 20 bad drivers I encountered previously do not cancel out my stereotype. I view them simply as individual bad drivers; they don't represent their

group to me because I don't hold a stereotype about their group's driving ability. For example, I don't have a pre-conceived judgment that white people are bad drivers, or Latino/a people, or working-class people. But I do have a pre-conceived notion about elderly drivers.

All humans have prejudice; it is not possible to avoid. If I am aware that a social group exists, I have to have information about that group that I have gained from the society around me. This information helps me make sense of the group from my cultural framework. For example, when I first heard reference to Hmong people, I had no idea who they were or where they were from. I was told that they were a refugee group from the mountains of Laos. With these three signifiers, I settled into an impression of the Hmong, woven from a network of ideas associated with those signifiers: my ideas about *refugees* (victims, impoverished, from war-torn "third world" countries), *mountains* (rural, peasant, live and cook outdoors) and *Laos* (small, inland Asian country). You might think of your mind as a computer that has to organize large amounts of information about many kinds of people. Because I do not have complete and accurate information about every group of people, I have to rely on superficial external labels to categorize them. We organize this information into "folders," labeled with various group names, for instance, Hmong, women, elderly, lesbians, and so forth. Each of these categories is connected to other categories. For example, whether a woman is white or Asian, young or old, poor or middle class, heterosexual or lesbian, will all further shape my perceptions. Unfortunately, this information isn't just superficial; it is gleaned from a society in which different values are assigned to different groups. For example, all of the associations I have for Hmong position them as less civilized or sophisticated than myself. While my associations might engender sympathy, they still assign differential value.

Prejudice is instantaneous and occurs at the pre-cognitive level (before I can consciously think about it or control it). For example, imagine that I, a white woman, am going into an underground parking garage. As I walk toward my car, I see a man standing between my car and the car next to it, on my passenger side. If it's during the day and the man is white, I usually do not feel fear. I might, however, feel fear in this situation at night. If the man standing by my car is black, I will likely feel some level of fear whether it is day or night. If the man standing by my car is Asian, I will *not* feel fear whether it is day or night. I have these reactions instantly, before I can even

think about them. This is because I have received relentless messages throughout my life about each of these kinds of men; for example, that black men are dangerous and highly sexual, and that Asian men are passive and nonsexual. As a white woman, I have had less experience with black men and Asian men, so I am more likely to rely on these messages; living in racial segregation, there has been very little in my life to counter them. However, I have a great deal of experience with white men, which is why I am less likely to feel afraid during the day but will have some fear at night—I have a more contextualized response.

But, you might say, as a woman alone you need to feel some fear—that is a healthy way to protect yourself. Yes, that is true. But the problem is that my assessments of safety in that situation are based on misinformation. Most personal crime occurs between people of the same race, so I am statistically at most risk from the white man. Thus, my misinformation is causing me to be off-guard when I shouldn't be and thus not actually keeping me safe (the infamous serial killer Ted Bundy, who was white, understood this well. He lured women into his car by pretending to have a broken arm. Seeing a well-dressed white man in need of assistance, the women were fooled.)

People who say, "I don't have a prejudiced bone in my body," are demonstrating a profound lack of self-awareness. Ironically, they are also demonstrating the power of socialization—we have all been taught in schools, through movies, from family members, teachers, and clergy that it is important not to be prejudiced. Prejudice, we are told, is bad. We wouldn't boast about our lack of prejudice if it weren't socially popular to insist we don't have it; if we hadn't been socialized into thinking we could and should avoid it. Unfortunately, this causes us to deny the unavoidable reality of prejudice. This teaching also works to guarantee our prejudices will be held in place, because we will put our energy into denying rather than examining and challenging them.

At the same time that we are taught to deny our prejudice overall, we are not taught to deny *all* of our prejudices. This is because at different historical and political moments in a given culture, some group prejudices are more acceptable than others. Two examples may illustrate this social dynamic. When I was growing up, it was perfectly acceptable in mainstream society to make fun of people with disabilities. One of my sisters, who has what we now understand to be a learning disability, was simply seen as stupid during our childhood. While it pains me to write that today, it was what everyone

around me called her—other children, my parents, relatives, and teachers—and so did I. She was relentlessly teased, called a “retard,” and even beaten up after school for being “dumb.” I don’t recall ever receiving feedback that this wasn’t appropriate or that she didn’t somehow deserve this treatment. Yet today this treatment would be seen as terrible (and I feel terrible about participating in it). As our knowledge of the learning process changed, we came to understand that people learn differently and we need to modify our teaching. This does not mean that we no longer look down on people with learning disabilities or that they don’t grow up with a sense of shame, but there have been improvements, and most adults or teachers wouldn’t as openly call someone stupid or punish them as they did in the past.

On the other hand, prejudice toward gay, lesbian, and gender non-conforming people is currently still socially acceptable. While today most people agree that shunning or denying basic rights to a person with a learning disability is unacceptable, I could easily get into a debate about the acceptability of shunning or denying gay people certain basic rights (such as marriage). Gay rights are debated all the time in social and political arenas. Context also plays a part—if I am liberal it is less acceptable for me to express my prejudice on this issue, but if I am conservative it is more acceptable. The fact that I could easily rouse people to debate the issue indicates that progress has been made; just 40 years ago there wouldn’t have been a debate—homosexuality was unquestionably seen as wrong in mainstream society. Yet although progress has been made, those who consciously hold prejudice toward gay people generally have no compunction about admitting it. (We all *unconsciously* hold some prejudice toward gay people—even if we are gay ourselves—because like racism, it is embedded in the culture at large. These dynamics are termed internalized dominance and internalized oppression and will be discussed in the next section.)

There are also emotional dimensions to prejudice. As we are learning our prejudices throughout our lives, emotions are often involved in the process. For example, if I am a child watching a Disney movie such as *Mulan*, in which the scary bad guy is a large Arab man with a beard, turban, and a machete, I am learning the classic stereotypes associated with Arabs, as well as learning to associate the *fear that I’m feeling* with Arabs. These stereotypes and fears will be reinforced in other aspects of my life, such as when I am watching the news and hear about a suspected suicide bomber, or when I hear my parents angrily discussing the 9/11 attacks, or my school is debating

whether to allow Muslim girls to wear head-coverings to class, or when the news is repeatedly showing images of strife in Muslim countries. None of my stereotypes have to be factual in reality in order to be “factual” in my mind. For example, I see Arabs and Muslims as interchangeable because they are presented as interchangeable through the misinformation that circulates in the culture at large.

The negative emotions associated with prejudice range from hatred, fear, mistrust, and disgust, to discomfort and lack of interest. However, most of us are taught to think of prejudice as simply hatred, and because most of us don’t consciously hate someone just because of their social group, we seldom relate to or see ourselves as prejudiced. But if we think of the emotions associated with prejudice as a continuum with hatred as the extreme at one end and discomfort at the other end, we may be more likely to admit that we do have prejudice (see Figure 6). For example, throughout all my years of education I have been separated from people with visible disabilities. I did not go to school with them because in U.S. society, people with disabilities usually go to separate schools and are hidden away. This in itself is a powerful message about their value, but it was reinforced by many other messages and indicators that they held less status and were less valuable than I was.

Figure 6: Emotions of Prejudice

BLATANT					SUBTLE	
Hatred	Fear	Disgust	Resentment	Discomfort	Lack of Interest	

Messages about children with disabilities included the ridicule about riding “the short bus,” the teasing that they endured when they were encountered, jokes and slurs about “retards,” the frustration and even anger my teachers showed with students who learned more slowly, and discussions in the news about parents getting amniocentesis to determine if their children had Down Syndrome so they could decide whether or not to abort. I grew up watching countless telethons about children with disabilities that portrayed them as tragic victims who would never lead meaningful lives without help. I was receiving the message that people with disabilities were less valuable, and I was also receiving the message that their lives were defined by suffering and limitation. These messages also came to me through stories about

their amazing courage to carry on in hopes of society finding a "cure" for their condition.

Understandably, I now feel awkward around people with visible disabilities because I am not sure how to act. If I'm walking down the hall in my building and someone is coming toward me using a wheelchair and we are reaching the door at the same time, I am often unsure about whether or not I should offer to hold the door open for them. What if I offend them by assuming that they need help? On the other hand to not offer them help may be insensitive. These conflicting feelings cause me discomfort, and I may simply opt to avoid the situation altogether and keep walking toward another exit.

Because I have so little authentic understanding of people with disabilities I have to rely on my stereotypes. These stereotypes may cause me to avoid the group altogether *without being aware that I'm doing so*; I simply won't be interested in getting to know people with disabilities. Certainly if someone comes into my life with a disability I will try to be open and accepting (in itself revealing my condescending attitude toward them). But I certainly won't seek them out or gravitate toward them in a social gathering.

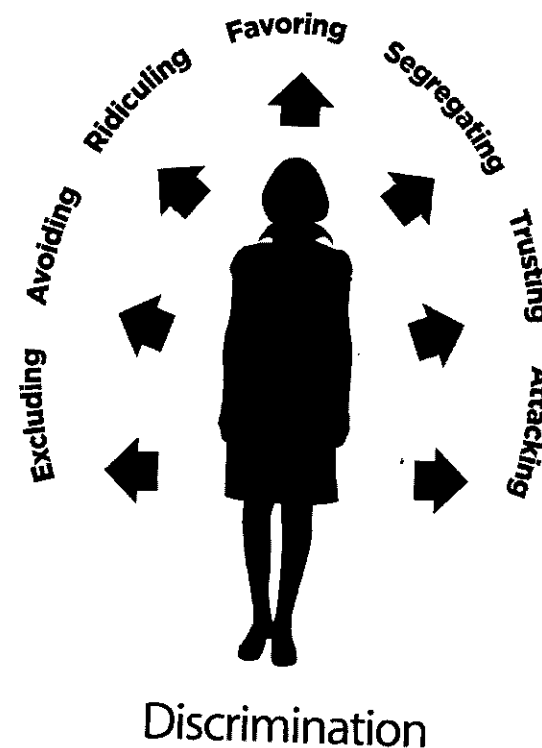
Thinking back to Chapter 3, we know that we absorb information throughout our lives about social others. All humans have prejudice (in the above example, the person using the wheelchair is just as likely to have prejudice toward me, perhaps assuming that because I am able-bodied I will be ignorant and insensitive toward people with disabilities). Thus the goal to never pre-judge or to wipe out all of our prejudice is not humanly possible. The goal that *is* possible, however, is to become *aware* of our prejudice and the *misinformation* on which it is based and to do our best to correct this information. But if we refuse to acknowledge that we have prejudice because we have been taught that prejudice is bad, we only end up protecting our misinformation and holding it in place.

Discrimination

Discrimination is *action* based upon prejudice. All of the messages we have absorbed in the society at large "leak out" and manifest in our actions. If we think of prejudice as the internal filters through which we view social others—how we perceive them and the values attached to those perceptions—then discrimination is the *action* that results from those filters.

Discrimination: Unfair action toward a social group and its members that is based upon prejudice about that group. Discrimination occurs at the individual level; all humans discriminate.

Figure 7: Discrimination



These actions include ignoring, excluding, threatening, ridiculing, slandering, and violence. For example, if hatred is the emotion we feel based on our prejudice, extreme acts of discrimination may follow. These forms of discrimination are usually clear and recognizable. But if *discomfort* is the feeling, the discrimination is likely to be much more subtle, even hard to detect (see Figure 8). For example, most of us can acknowledge that we do feel some discomfort around certain groups of people, if only a heightened sense of self-consciousness, as with the person with the disability I avoid in the hallway. But this discomfort doesn't come naturally; it comes from our

prejudices, which are learned. This is the result of living separate from a group of people while simultaneously absorbing incomplete or erroneous information about them. When the prejudice causes me to *act* differently—I avoid the person in the hallway—I am now discriminating.

Figure 8: Negative Emotions and Actions

PREJUDICE:	Hatred	Fear	Disgust	Resentment	Discomfort	Lack of Interest
DISCRIMINATION:	Violence	Exclusion	Ridicule/Blame	Avoidance	Segregation	

Putting prejudice together with discrimination, imagine that I am a storeowner who is worried about shoplifting. I may automatically give the benefit of the doubt to middle-aged, white, female customers who appear to be middleclass. I don't worry about these customers or keep an eye on them as they shop.

Remember: Prejudice and discrimination are always at play in human interaction. They are also operating for those people we see as *normal*, and thus *don't* mistrust or treat as less than.

However, if one of the variables here is changed—for example, if they are white, middle-aged women but appear to be homeless or dressed in a way that indicates a lower class status—my suspicion may be aroused. On the other hand, when young black female customers enter my store, regardless of what their class status appears to be, I am likely to feel suspicious and watch them more closely. I might not even be aware that I am doing this, but because the media and popular discourse constantly associate young blacks with crime, I will see these customers through this filter, and act accordingly.

This difference in my assumptions is not benign—it has an impact on both shoppers. Although my prejudice is *positive* for the white, middle-aged, middle-class shopper, it is still *unfair* in that this customer was automatically granted it based on assumptions about her age, race, and class. This allows her to have an enjoyable shopping experience wherein she feels respected and unself-conscious about her race or other aspects of identity. She is not likely to be aware that she is being viewed more favorably than other shoppers; she can take this privilege for granted. While I should treat all of my customers equally, the fact that I don't turns my positive treatment of this

customer into a *privilege* that she can take for granted and enjoy, but others cannot.

Figure 9: Positive Emotions and Actions

PREJUDICE:	See as Superior	Prefer	Benefit of the Doubt	See as Normal/Benign	
DISCRIMINATION:	Defer to	Include	Gravitate toward	Trust	Treat as an individual

The shopper that I do watch because I assume she has bad intentions will certainly not see my prejudice as fair. The social cues of mistrust that I convey, although they may seem subtle to me (if I am aware of them at all), will be easily read by this shopper because she has likely had this experience many times before. This raises another aspect of being on the receiving end of prejudice—while the shopkeeper likely sees herself as an individual and if confronted on her suspicion might insist that it only happened this once (if she can admit to it at all), for the suspected shopper this is *not* an isolated experience. Both shopper and storeowner, while individuals, are also swimming in their cultural water and represent their larger social groups and their collective experiences.

Remember: The nature of an assumption is that I don't know I am making it. One need not be aware of his or her assumptions in order to hold them and act on them.

As another example of the more subtle aspects of discrimination, I may find myself in the rare work situation of standing in a group of African American colleagues and use a term that I often use (perhaps a term with the word "black" in it), but now I am suddenly very self-conscious that I have used that term in front of my black colleagues and begin to question whether or not it's appropriate or if I offended anyone. This causes me to feel awkward and ultimately to behave differently than I would around a group of white colleagues. It might even cause me to avoid being in that situation again.

Prejudice also manifests as discrimination in an even more subtle way—for example, simply being uninterested in a group of people. This lack of interest is not natural, or a fluke, or "just me." Because I rarely ever see or hear about this group in any consistent or positive way, I learn that they are

not socially valuable, and therefore I do not value them. This allows me to feel comfortable living in segregation and not having any relationships with them. For example: if you are under 30 years old, consider how many relationships you have with elderly people who are not family members or friends of family members. Very few of us have cross-generational friendships. This is the result of a society that separates us by age, presents the elderly in very limited ways (if at all) in the media, and teaches us to feel contempt for aging and impatient with and dismissive of the elderly.

If we think about how we rationalize this lack of interest in the elderly, we will surface many of the prejudicial stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs we hold. For example, I might rationalize the fact that I have no elderly friends by claiming that they aren't interested in what I am interested in; they are too slow; they are too conservative; it takes so long to do anything or go anywhere; they are boring; they are physically unpleasant; I don't know any elderly people; and so on. All of these beliefs translate into a basic lack of value of the elderly, and I feel no loss in not having them in my life. These attitudes have been created and supported in large part by two key social dynamics: *segregation* and *limited representation* in society.

Who Discriminates?

Pause for a moment to reflect on this question: Can we have our social prejudices and *not* discriminate? Many people believe that we can, but the research shows differently (Allport, 1979; Elsass & Graves, 1997; Gilbert, Fiske, & Lindzey, 1998). Just as all people have prejudices learned through socialization, all people discriminate. Because prejudice informs how we *view* others, it necessarily informs how we *act* toward others. This action may be subtle—as subtle as awkwardness, reserve, avoidance, and disinterest. But again, this disinterest is not natural, neutral, or benign; it is *learned*, and it results in (among other things) not developing relationships with people from particular groups.

To understand the power of our socialization and the unconscious prejudice and discrimination that results from it, consider an important study on racial discrimination in hiring (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Despite common claims that racism is in the past and that the playing field is now level, patterns of inequality between whites and blacks in the U.S. job market, in terms of both rate of employment and pay, are well documented. Seeking to understand these patterns, researchers at the University of

Chicago conducted a large study in which they responded to over 1,300 help-wanted ads in Boston and Chicago newspapers. They sent out close to 5,000 resumes to a range of employers in both the public and private sectors. The qualifications on the resumes were consistent, but the researchers randomly assigned stereotypically white-sounding names, such as Emily Walsh or Greg Baker, to half of the resumes, and stereotypically African American-sounding names, such as Lakisha Washington or Jamal Jones, to the other half. They found that regardless of the employer, occupation, industry, or size of the company, the call-back rate for the resumes with white-sounding names was *50 percent higher* than for the resumes with black-sounding names.

Because mainstream culture often insists that if someone is having trouble finding a job the issue is just a matter of qualifications, the researchers also investigated how improvements in credentials affected the call-back rate. The resumes with white-sounding names received 30 percent *more* call-backs when the credentials improved. But there was *no* significant improvement in call-back rates for applicants perceived as black when their qualifications improved. In other words, even when the applicants perceived as black were *more* qualified, they were still discriminated against; there were no benefits to black applicants for improving their credentials. Discrimination against more qualified applicants but with black-sounding names remained consistent and did not vary based on occupation, region, or industry.

This study, among many others, provides empirical evidence that—contrary to the beliefs of many whites—racial discrimination against blacks is real, pervasive, and ongoing. It also raises an important question: What happened when the human resource workers screened those resumes? It is highly likely that they were unaware that they were discriminating and would have vigorously (and sincerely) denied any suggestion that they were. They would not be intentionally lying when they denied that they were engaged in racial discrimination, and herein lies the power of socialization: we often have no idea that we are discriminating based on prejudice. Like the orchestra judges who simply believed women were less qualified musicians and thus heard their playing through that filter, what the screeners saw just appeared to be the *truth*: this candidate is less qualified than that one. But the screeners necessarily read the resumes through their cultural *lenses*, which were racially biased.

When the screeners opened the resumes and saw, for example, the name Lakisha Washington, a name traditionally associated in our culture with blacks, their racial filter for "blacks" was activated. From that moment on, they were reading her resume through these filters, which are filled with the assumptions and expectations that circulate in the culture at large: her qualifications will be inferior because society tells us that blacks are inherently less qualified than whites. This is a function of the unavoidable power of socialization; it happens instantaneously and is almost always unconscious. We will simply interpret Lakisha's resume in a way that fulfills our expectations that she is less qualified; the facts do not get in the way of our unconscious beliefs. Names such as Julie Nelson or Daniel Miller don't trigger the same set of racial filters because they are associated with dominant culture, and thus we will perceive them as neutral or *normal* names. (How we have been socialized to associate white and normal will be discussed in Chapters 6–9.)

While the resume readers necessarily also read the resumes of applicants with white-sounding names through a racial filter, these filters did not penalize the applicants; white applicants are the norm against which black applicants are measured. The racial filter for whites does not assume the person is unqualified *based on race* the way that the filter for black applicants does. This comparison is not dependent on our awareness of it.

Regardless of the race of the human resource employees screening these resumes, names convey ideas about race, class, gender, and ethnicity to everyone, as we are all affected by the messages in mainstream culture. Names are connected to group categories, and these categories are assigned different values by society. This illustrates the power of our filters and the dilemma of our denial of them; if we can't or won't admit that we have them, we can't challenge them or put protections in place to help minimize their impact. For example, because this study provided powerful proof of racial discrimination, many companies now block out the names on resumes before sending them to hiring committees, just as screens are now more often used in orchestra auditions. Intentions alone are not strong enough to overcome socialization; this takes study and practice. In the meantime, we need to be willing to concede that they exist and put protections in place against them.

The Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) was developed in order to access aspects of bias that a person is either unaware of or cannot admit to. (Whereas the researchers use the term bias, I

tend to use the term prejudice; thus they are used interchangeably here.) The test measures implicit bias toward a wide range of social groups. It is accessible to anyone online and guides the viewer through a series of rapid associations (implicit.harvard.edu). For example, test-takers are asked which of the two terms "Male" and "Female" is more strongly associated with the term "Logical." The more rapid your response, the more closely the terms are associated in your memory. The test has been highly researched and has consistently demonstrated validity (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). After 7 years of administering the test, the following conclusions have been drawn (adapted from the Project Implicit website):

Implicit Biases Are Pervasive

Bias appears as statistically large effects that are often shown by majorities of samples of Americans. For example, over 80% of web respondents show implicit negativity toward the elderly compared to the young; 75–80% of self-identified whites and Asians show an implicit preference for whites compared to blacks.

Most People Are Unaware of Their Implicit Biases

People have been found to hold negative biases in relation to various social groups even while sincerely reporting that they regard themselves as not holding these biases. Implicit bias is found equally across all groups. No one group of people is any more or less biased than another.

Implicit Biases Predict Behavior

From simple acts such as friendliness and inclusion to more consequential acts such as the evaluation of work quality, those who display greater implicit bias have been shown to display greater discrimination. The published scientific evidence is rapidly accumulating. Over 200 published scientific investigations have made use of one or another version of the IAT.

People Differ in Their Levels of Implicit Bias

Although implicit bias is universal, levels vary from person to person. Certain experiences may make a person more aware of bias and thus able to challenge it in themselves—for instance, being from a minoritized group. In addition, consciously held attitudes interact with implicit bias and can help to mediate it. The level of bias existing in the immediate environment can also

impact individual levels. This is why media literacy and other manifestations of critical thinking are so crucial.

All human beings have prejudice and all human beings discriminate toward other human beings based on that prejudice. Concepts such as "reverse discrimination" and statements such as "They are just as prejudiced as we are" don't really make any sense if you understand that prejudice and discrimination are universal. If you have this understanding, why point out that prejudice goes both ways or that "they" are also prejudiced? Pointing this out is often done as a way to justify one's own prejudice. Prejudice doesn't need justifying in the sense that one can't help but have absorbed it from the cultural water that surrounds us. However, acceptance of one's prejudices as they stand cannot in good conscience be justified; prejudice is hurtful and causes serious suffering to others. Prejudice can and should be addressed by taking steps to challenge the misinformation on which prejudice is based and the segregation that keeps that misinformation alive.

Understanding that prejudice and discrimination occur at the individual level and that all individuals have prejudices and act upon them is critical to understanding racism. But prejudice and discrimination are not the same as racism, and these terms should not be used interchangeably (the connections and differences between prejudice, discrimination, and *racism* will be discussed in Chapter 7).

Oppression

To oppress is to hold down—to press—and deny a social group full access to resources in a given society. Oppression describes a set of policies, practices, traditions, norms, definitions, cultural stories, and explanations that function to systematically hold down one social group to the benefit of another social group. The group that benefits from oppression is called the *dominant* (or agent) group, and the group that is oppressed is called the *minoritized* (or target) group. Scholars use the term *minoritized* (rather than minority) to indicate that the group's lower position is a function of socially constructed dynamics, rather than its numbers in society. In order to oppress, a group must hold institutional power in society. Holding institutional power enables a group to control resources and to impose its worldview throughout the society in ways that are difficult to avoid. Oppression is historical (long-term and ongoing) and thus becomes automatic and normalized. Thus, we are

all socialized to see this group's position as normal, natural, and even necessary for the good of society.

Oppression is different from prejudice and discrimination in that prejudice and discrimination describe dynamics that occur on the individual level and in which anyone can (and does) participate. For example, people with disabilities can be prejudiced against the able-bodied, and the elderly can be prejudiced against the young. But oppression occurs when one group's *collective* prejudice is backed by social, political, economic, and institutional power. The elderly and people with disabilities are not in the position to impose their prejudices on the rest of society. Oppression is the result of prejudice *plus* the power to enforce that prejudice throughout the culture. The prejudice becomes embedded in the very fabric of society, in institutions such as media, family, religion, education, language, economics, and criminal justice, *and in cultural definitions of what is normal, real, correct, beautiful, and valuable*. This results in the *systematic* mistreatment of a targeted group.

Oppression: Group prejudice and discrimination backed by institutional power. The term "oppression" indicates that one group is in the *position to enforce* their prejudice and discrimination against another group *throughout the society*; the prejudice and discrimination have moved from the individual to the societal level and have long-term and far-reaching impacts. *Prejudice + Discrimination + Power = Oppression.*

Understanding the difference between discrimination and oppression will build a foundation for understanding racism. The history of women's suffrage (gaining the right to vote) in the United States illustrates several distinguishing features of oppression. Consider how women received the right to vote in the United States. Women played a primary role—they had to organize and fight for many years to gain the vote. Yet ultimately the ability to grant women the vote rested in the hands of men. Only men could actually grant the right to vote to women because only men occupied the institutional positions of power necessary to do so; women could not grant themselves the right to vote because they did not hold institutional power. Hence, while both groups could be prejudiced against the other, only men were in the position to oppress women throughout the whole of society. Women could discrimi-

nate against men in temporary and individual situations, but could not pass far-reaching legislation that limited *all* men's lives.

The question of suffrage was not isolated to the realm of politics; many other institutions—also controlled by men—worked together in interlocking ways to ensure that women were viewed as incapable of handling the responsibility of voting. Because men control all of the major institutions of society—government, media, economics, religion, medicine, education, police, and military—men as a group, from the founding of the United States, have been in the position to weave their prejudice into the very fabric of society. A society in which men are seen as having the inherent right to rule over women is termed a *patriarchy*. The United States was founded as a patriarchal system. Patriarchy and *androcentrism* are closely linked. Androcentrism is the belief that men are inherently superior to women, and it is based on the underlying idea that males represent the human norm, and females are a deviation from that norm. Patriarchy and androcentrism worked together to make it difficult for women to gain suffrage.

For example, because scientists began with the premise of female inferiority (androcentrism), their research questions and the interpretation of their findings were informed by that assumption. Because they were in the institutional positions to disseminate their findings through journals, textbooks, and universities (patriarchy), they were able to reinforce and rationalize their positions. Other institutions worked to normalize male dominance: the clergy preached male superiority from the pulpit and rationalized it through the Bible; doctors used the male body as their reference point; psychiatrists based definitions of mental health on male norms for emotions and definitions of rationality; and male professors taught men's history, thoughts, and interests. Women's lack of voting rights was not an isolated issue: all of the institutions of society, which were built on patriarchy and androcentrism, worked together to enforce the idea that women were inferior and thus should not have the same rights as men.

Social Binaries

All major social groups are organized into binary (either/or) identities (i.e., male/female, black/white, straight/gay, rich/poor). Returning to Cooley's concept of the *looking glass self*, these identities depend upon one another because each identity is defined by its opposite (or *other*). The category "masculine" can have no meaning without an understanding of a category called "feminine," "rich" can have no meaning without "poor,"

"young" can have no meaning without "old," and so on. Not only are these identities constructed as opposites, but they are also ranked into a hierarchy of *value*.

Figure 10 illustrates the historical and current relationships of inequality between some of these key social groups in the United States and the term for that specific form of oppression.

Figure 10: Oppression Chart

Minoritized/Target Group	Oppression	Dominant/Agent Group
People of Color	Racism	White
Poor, Working-Class	Classism	Middle-Class, Wealthy
Women	Sexism	Men
Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals	Heterosexism	Heterosexuals
Transgendered, Transsexuals, Gender Queer, Gender Non-Conforming, Intersexed	Transgender Oppression	Gender-Conforming
Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, etc.	Religious Oppression	Christians
People with Disabilities	Ableism	Able-bodied
Jews	Anti-Semitism	Non-Jews (gentiles)
Immigrants (perceived), Indigenous peoples	Nationalism	Citizens (perceived)
Elderly	Ageism	Young Middle-aged
Children	Adultism	Adults

This hierarchical social arrangement is termed *social stratification*, a system in which one social group is positioned in society as more valuable than its opposite: men are more valuable than women; the rich are more valuable than the poor; the young are more valuable than the old. The identity group that is positioned as more valuable—the dominant group—will have more access to the resources of society. The group positioned as less valuable—the minoritized group—will receive less access to the resources of the society. People in the society will be taught to see the difference in access to resources as fair and legitimate (for example in the case of women's suffrage, men's greater access to resources was seen as legitimate based on rationalizations that men were able to disseminate throughout society). The terms used to describe these relationships of inequality between dominant and minoritized groups usually end in "ism," for example sexism and racism.

Most people find themselves in both dominant and minoritized group positions (i.e., in some categories on the left side and in other categories on the right side of the chart). One is not simply a woman, but a white woman, or a heterosexual, white, middle-class, able-bodied Jewish woman—and each of these group positions intersect in important ways that I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 11.

Returning to the struggle for women's suffrage, the concept of intersecting identities adds more layers of binary relationships. When we consider the dimensions of class and race, we see that white upper class women were recognized as the legitimate leaders of the movement, and these women resisted the inclusion of black women. So while the "women" we commonly refer to as suffragists were oppressed as women, they were privileged as *white* women. Their privileged racial status has been downplayed as they have been held up as representing *all* women. Yet in practice they only represented *white* women's interests (and middle/upper class white women in particular). In fact, many leading suffragists, such as Elizabeth Kady Stanton, stated openly that white women were more worthy of the vote than blacks (Ginzburg, 2009).

Understanding Oppression

Understanding how oppression works and why it is different from prejudice and discrimination requires us to understand that oppression involves pervasive, historical, political relationships between social *groups*. Oppres-

sion goes well beyond individual or situational interactions. When scholars use the term oppression (or use the terms that refer to the forms oppression takes such as racism, ableism, heterosexism, and sexism), we refer to these large-scale, historical, political, and pervasive relationships. We are not referring only to individual acts of prejudice or discrimination, which all people can commit. Rather, we are referring to the dynamics of a group's *collective power over* the group that is seen as its less-valuable opposite (men/women; heterosexual/gay). All people have prejudice, but only the dominant group is in the position of social, historical, and institutional power to back its prejudice with policies and procedures that infuse it throughout the entire society.

Remember: Prejudice and oppression are not the same and these terms should not be used interchangeably. Oppression includes the dynamics of social and institutional power, while prejudice does not.

The ism words allow us to discuss these specific forms of oppression and to include the dynamics of unequal social and institutional power between dominant and minoritized groups. In this way, we avoid reducing oppression to individual acts of prejudice and claiming that these acts are comparable, regardless of who commits them. From this understanding, so-called "reverse racism" or "reverse sexism" do not exist, because racism and sexism refer to power relations that are historic, embedded, and pervasive—the same groups who have historically held systemic power in the United States continue to do so. For example, despite suffrage and women's numerical majority, in 2008 women were still only 16% of the House and Senate, 10% of the Supreme Court, and have never held the highest office, the presidency.

The United Nations has concluded that a critical mass of at least 30 percent of women is needed before government policies begin to reflect women's priorities and before there is a shift in the governmental management style and organizational culture. Yet in the entire history of the United States, only 2.1 percent of members of Congress have been women. In 2010, the United States was 78th in an international ranking of women's representation in federal government. While numbers do matter, oppression isn't simply the result of a numerical majority (for example, women are the majority of the world yet do not hold institutional power, and blacks were the majority under South Africa's apartheid rule). Oppression is a multidimensional imbalance

of social, political, and institutional power that is taken for granted and thus accepted by most people in the society.

Further, because inequality between groups is rationalized and justified by all of the institutions of society, oppression cannot be ended through legislation alone. Oppression is also embedded within individual and collective consciousness through socialization. Both dominant and minoritized groups are socialized into their roles, and these roles come to be seen as natural. When we believe the social hierarchy is natural, it is difficult to see our positions within it as unequal or problematic. For example, not all women were interested in gaining suffrage. Many women were taught to believe that voting was a man's domain and inappropriate for women. Thus the suffrage movement had to convince other *women*, as well as men, that it was in women's best interests to have a role in the political system that controlled their lives. This process of re-socializing the minoritized group is termed *consciousness-raising* and it was a fundamental piece in the struggle for women's suffrage. However, ultimately only men had the institutional power to actually grant women suffrage.

Oppression Is Historical

The under-representation of women in government is not simply the result of any single election and cannot be remedied by isolated changes in the law. Women received the right to vote in 1920 in the United States, but the oppression of women by men did not end the day suffrage was granted. Oppression has deep historical roots and does not change overnight based on a single victory. In fact, isolated victories, while important, often work to fool people into believing that the relationship of inequality has ended and thus no further effort is required. But even if the critical mass of at least 30% of women in government proposed by the United Nations was achieved overnight, the androcentric norms, traditions and beliefs embedded in our institutions would continue (indeed, in order for women to be elected, they have to play by the rules of men). Androcentrism is so taken for granted that most people can't see it even as they uphold it; this includes women. Change is slow and efforts must continue over time and throughout the whole of society. Understanding the historical dimensions of oppression may also help us to see why temporary and limited policies such as Affirmative Action can't in and of themselves reverse the forces of oppression.

Oppression Is Institutional

Government is only one institution dominated by men. Men also dominate all other major institutions (military, medicine, media, criminal justice, policing, finance, industry, higher education, and science). These institutions are interconnected and function together to uphold male dominance across all dimensions of society. In the case of suffrage, women were not in a position to use any of the institutions in their fight and could only rely on a few sympathetic men to present their case for them or allow them limited opportunities to present it for themselves. This is another reason why victories in a single domain don't end oppression. Even when male government officials finally granted women the right to vote, women were not immediately accepted into the halls of power. The government remained male dominated, as did all of the other institutions.

While institutions are created and maintained by people, they have a life and a power well beyond those of individual members. Due to the institutional dimensions of oppression, no individual from the dominant group has to actively do anything unfair in order for the *system* to be unfair. Thus while individual members of a dominant group may support the rights of a given minoritized group, institutions still grant them privileges not made available to the minoritized group. This is another reason why oppression can be difficult to see; we are taught to focus on individual acts of cruelty rather than look at systems as a whole.

Oppression Is Ideological

Ideology refers to the big ideas that are reinforced throughout society. Ideologies provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand, and make sense of social existence (Hall, 1997). As such, they play a foundational role in the maintenance and reproduction of oppression. Because these ideas are constantly reinforced, they are very hard to avoid believing. Examples of ideology in the United States include: individualism; the superiority of capitalism as an economic system and democracy as a political system; consumerism as a valuable lifestyle; and meritocracy (anyone can succeed if they work hard). From the time we are born we are conditioned into accepting and not questioning these ideas. Ideology is reinforced in multiple ways, for example through schools and textbooks, in political speeches, through movies and advertising, in holiday celebrations

such as Columbus Day and Independence Day, through words and phrases, and through the limited availability of alternative ideas.

Much of the ideology that circulates in the United States works to obscure and deny oppression. This ideology rationalizes social hierarchies as the outcome of a natural order resulting from individual effort or talent. Those that don't succeed are just not as capable, deserving, or hard-working. Ideologies that work to obscure inequality are perhaps the most powerful forces of oppression because once we accept our positions within social hierarchies, they seem natural and difficult to question, even when we are disadvantaged by them. In this way, very little external pressure needs to be applied; once the rationalizations for inequality are internalized, both sides of an oppressive relationship will work to uphold the social order. This may help us understand why gaining suffrage alone did not end oppression against women. The ideologies of patriarchy and androcentrism remained deeply embedded in our culture, in the foundations of our institutions, and in the consciousness of both men *and* women.

Oppression Results in Systematic Dominant Group Privilege

The term *privilege* refers to rights, benefits, and resources that are purported to be shared by all but are only consistently available to the dominant group. The fact that an assumed right is not granted to everyone turns it into a privilege—an unearned advantage. For example, prior to suffrage, even if individual men believed women should have the right to vote, as men they still benefited from women's exclusion. In this way, oppression is not personal and intentions are irrelevant.

If we are in a dominant group, we can think of privilege as the current in the water that is going in our direction; the society is set up to affirm, accommodate, and reward the norms of our group. Anyone who has ever swam with a current knows that the current makes swimming so much easier. You may still exert yourself, but your efforts take you twice as far as they would without the current. In fact, you could stop exerting yourself and you would still be moved along in the direction that you want to go. Conversely, when you swim *against* the current, you have to work twice as hard to get half as far. One of the distinguishing features of privilege is that it is usually not recognized as such by the dominant group. The dominant group either assumes the privilege is available to everyone, or that they personally earned it, or that it is simply good luck. Because the currents of privilege—pushing

the dominant group forward while pushing against the minoritized group—are invisible to the dominant group, they can say, "I worked hard for what I have, why can't they?"

Oppression Does Not Go Both Ways

Members of a dominant group may be a numerical minority in a given context and experience short-term and contextual discrimination. For example, men in female dominated fields may experience feelings of isolation and disconnection from cultural norms in that context, and they may experience discrimination and exclusion from the women with whom they work. They may also be discriminated against based on stereotypes, such as the belief that they may be more likely to abuse vulnerable populations. However, while these are forms of discrimination and may be painful, they are not oppression because they are temporary and context-specific. The historical, ideological, institutional, and cultural dimensions of society are still patriarchal and androcentric and reward and advance men over women. In fact, evidence shows that in fields in which women constitute a majority (teaching, nursing, social work), men are most likely to rise to positions of leadership over women (principals, administrators, department heads, professors) (Williams, 1992, 1995).

The Forces of Oppression Are Interlocking

Scholar Marilyn Frye uses the metaphor of a birdcage to describe the interlocking forces of oppression (1983). If you stand close to a birdcage to press your face against the wires, your perception of the bars will disappear and you will have an almost unobstructed view of the bird. If you turn your head to examine one wire of the cage closely, you will not be able to see the other wires. If your understanding of the cage is based upon this myopic view, you may not understand why the bird doesn't just go around the single wire and fly away. You might even assume that the bird liked or chose its place in the cage (which, from this distance, wouldn't appear as a cage at all). But if instead of taking a close-up view, you stepped back and took a wider view, you would begin to see that the wires come together in an interlocking pattern—a pattern that works to hold the bird firmly in place. It now becomes clear that a network of systematically related barriers surrounds the bird. Taken individually, none of these barriers would be that

difficult for the bird to get around, but because they interlock with each other, they thoroughly restrict the bird.

The birdcage metaphor helps us to understand why oppression can be so hard to see and recognize: we have a limited view. Without recognizing how our *position* in relation to the bird defines how much of the cage we can see, we rely on single situations, exceptions, and anecdotal evidence for our understanding, rather than on broader, interlocking patterns. Although there are always exceptions, the patterns are consistent and well documented: oppressed groups are confined and shaped by forces and barriers that are not accidental, occasional, or avoidable. These forces are systematically related to each other in ways that restrict their movement overall.

Dominant groups, because of their social and institutional positions, necessarily have the most limited or myopic view of society. But because they control the institutions, they have the means to legitimize their view and impose it on others. Minoritized groups often have the widest view of society, in that they must understand both their own and the dominant group's perspective. In order to succeed in dominant culture they must develop what race scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, writing in 1903, termed *double-consciousness*. Du Bois was writing about race, but the term has relevance for other minoritized groups: in spite of their wider view or expanded consciousness, minoritized groups are at the bottom of the social hierarchy, and thus their view is seen as the least legitimate in society. Another challenge in seeing oppression is that both dominant and minoritized groups are socialized into seeing their positions in the hierarchy as natural. Scholars use the terms "internalized dominance" and "internalized oppression" to refer to this acceptance of our socialization into unequal groupings. Although this socialization can be resisted (and I have written this book to aid whites in resisting internalized racial dominance), resistance takes intentional effort and is not without personal and social costs.

Oppression Is Deeply Woven into the Fabric of Society

When I use the example of women's suffrage during a class or workshop, I end by asking this question: Today, if men—as a group—wanted to take away women's right to vote, could they? The vast majority of people answer no, that men could not take away women's right to vote today. I then show them the statistics discussed earlier, and explain that in 2010 the United States was 78th in an international ranking of women's representation in

federal parliaments (IPU, 2010). We are below Liechtenstein, which didn't grant women the right to vote until 1984. In fact, the top-ranked country in the world in terms of women holding office is Rwanda. Iraq, Pakistan, and China all rank higher than the United States.

After hearing these statistics, most people quickly realize that indeed men could take away women's right to vote if they wanted to. This powerfully illustrates some of the key dimensions of oppression: it is historical and deeply embedded in all institutions and in the social fabric of society. Thus, it does not move back and forth, changing directions between groups. All of the groups who have been historically oppressed since the founding of the United States continue to be. Oppression adapts overtime so that it looks more acceptable to the culture at a given historical moment, but it does not end easily. Patriarchy and androcentrism did not end the day that women were granted the right to vote. Although I do not believe that men will take women's right to vote away, the point is that they remain in the institutional positions of power so that they could, if they chose to. For example, the Equal Rights Amendment, which was proposed in 1923, has 3 simple sections:

- Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.
- Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.
- Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

Yet the Equal Rights Amendment did not receive the necessary number of endorsements by the final date of 1982 and although efforts continue, it has not been ratified and is not part of the United States Constitution. Indeed, in 2011, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia stated that the Constitution—and the Fourteenth Amendment—does not protect women against discrimination, and was never intended to do so.

Remember: Oppression is a multidimensional imbalance of social, political, and institutional power that spans history and is taken for granted by most people in the society.

Oppression Results in Internalized Dominance for the Dominant Group

Males and females are born into a society in which males are collectively privileged over females: men are the dominant group. The "ism" term for this form of oppression is *sexism*. For males, this means that from the time they are born, they are conditioned to see their positions as natural and earned, and most come to accept their place in the hierarchy. This process is termed *internalized dominance* (or internalized superiority). We don't need to consciously think of ourselves as superior to someone else based on their group membership, but because this superiority is embedded in the very framework from which we operate, it underlies and informs our daily thoughts and actions.

Internalized Dominance: The result of socialization in which members of the dominant group are conditioned into their roles. These roles position them as more deserving of the resources of society than the group who is relationally minoritized.

For example, if I ask one of my straight male students if he would be willing to put on a dress, smoke a Virginia Slims cigarette, drink a "fruity drink" at a football party, paint his fingernails, or otherwise enact norms associated with females, he would most likely (and quite emphatically) say, "No!" I can safely predict that the rest of the class would erupt in laughter, especially the other males. These males might even tease this student for the rest of the semester, simply because my suggestion *associated* him with female norms. This is because a straight male who associates himself with cultural norms assigned to females loses status in two social groups in which he has dominance: gender and sexuality. Yet if I asked him to explain why he has such a strong negative reaction—how he came to see these requests as beneath him—he would most likely not be able to answer. His position is so deeply internalized for him that he hasn't had to think about it. (My female

students however, might have less trouble.) His reaction to my request and his difficulty in articulating the socialization that led to that reaction is the result of internalized dominance.

The specific ways in which racial superiority is internalized for whites will be discussed in Chapter 9. But to use a non-racial example to further illustrate the depth and acceptance of internalized dominance, consider society's relationship to animals as a food source. Other than vegetarians, most people eat animals every day without a second thought. At the same time, we know that animals suffer and feel pain, form attachments, bond with their offspring, and have a survival instinct similar to our own (in other words, they want to live). Yet in our culture, it is taken for granted that we are entitled to kill and eat animals. When asked how they could allow animals to be killed and eaten, most people would have no trouble answering (they may even scoff at the absurdity of the question). Their answers would likely include: they were put on the earth for us to eat; it's natural to eat them; survival of the fittest; nature is filled with predators; meat is delicious; meat is a necessary food source; hunting is an enjoyable sport, and so on. Notice the deeply held belief underlying these reasons: human needs and interests are elevated above those of animals, giving humans the right to kill and eat them.

Sometimes this right is rationalized through religion (god put them here for us; it's man's place to rule the earth), and sometimes as a function of nature (we have to eat animals for protein in order to survive; humans have always hunted). For the purposes of illustrating internalized dominance, I am less interested in whether these rationalizations are valid and more interested in the fact that we completely take for granted our right to kill and eat animals. This right, because it's deeply embedded in our collective unconscious, infuses all aspects of our relationship to animals, including the ease with which we can dismiss their potential suffering. For example, many advertisements for hamburgers and other meat products use the animals in their ads. Ads for hamburgers often feature a cow, and the cow may even have been anthropomorphized (infused with human characteristics) and is perhaps wearing clothes and speaking to us. Sometimes these ads even poke fun at the fact that the animal is going to end up in the frying pan. That these ads actually work to make the meat product *more* appealing to us—rather than turn us off when we think about eating animals with human characteristics—

ties—illustrates the depth and power of our fundamental cultural paradigm that we have dominion over animals.

If we were socialized from birth to see an animal's right to life as equal to our own, the belief that we should not kill and eat it would seem just as natural. For example, we don't see *all* animals as food sources that we have a right to kill and eat: cows but not dogs, tuna but not dolphins. A common reaction in the United States to the concept of eating dogs illustrates the *socialized* nature of our relationship to animals as a food source. We see cultures that eat dogs as uncivilized. An ad for a burger made of dog meat, in which the dog is wearing clothes and talking to us next to an image of himself made into a burger, would be unthinkable. Yet there are cultures that see us as barbaric for eating cows and pigs.

Consider our rationales for which animals we comfortably eat and which animals we don't. Do we not eat dogs because they are smart? Pigs are actually smarter. Do we not eat dogs because they are cute? Lambs are cute, too. Do we not eat dogs because they are our companions? They are not naturally human companions—we chose them and domesticated them as such, and many animals we eat in the West have been shown to be capable of being companions to humans—people have made pets of animals including goats, rabbits, and pigs.

My point here is two-fold. First, that our sense of ourselves as having dominion over others (be those "others" human or animal) is *socialized*, and thus arbitrary; this means we can challenge and change it. While it may feel natural to eat meat or dominate others, we are also able to live quite well (even healthier) without eating meat. It is also possible to live without dominating others. Second, this assumption of dominion is so deeply *internalized* and taken for granted that it isn't questioned; we just feel that we have the right to this position. Questioning or challenging this right often causes anger, resentment, dismissal, and ridicule.

For example, I asked several colleagues to read this section using the right to kill animals as an example of internalized dominance. All of them said that they completely understood my point and could find no loopholes in my argument, but that they feared it would make readers too defensive and it would, therefore, be dismissed. In other words, readers would get caught up in defending the right to eat meat and miss the larger point: once we are socialized into our position, it is so deeply internalized as to be outside the realm of *question*. Suggesting that dominant groups have not earned their

positions or do not automatically have the right to them ("this is MY job or MY neighborhood") challenges internalized dominance and raises similar defenses and dismissals. I ask my readers to use their reactions to the example of our relationship to animals as a window onto understanding the power of internalized entitlement to one's position in the social hierarchy.

Oppression Results in Internalized Oppression for the Minoritized Group

Minoritized group members are also born into a society that socializes them to accept their place in the hierarchy. While they may resist this socialization, they cannot fully avoid it and must constantly navigate it. *Internalized oppression* is the term for accepting and acting out (often unintentionally) the constant messages that you and your group are inferior to the dominant group and thus deserving of your lower position. Like internalized dominance, internalized oppression is deeply held. Once we accept our lower position in the social hierarchy, it doesn't seem like inequality at all but normal, natural, perhaps even preferred.

Internalized Oppression: The result of socialization in which members of a minoritized group are conditioned into their roles. These roles position them as inferior to the group who is relationally dominant, and thus less deserving of the resources of society.

Claude Steele's work in *stereotype threat* (1997) demonstrates internalized oppression in action. Steele's basic premise is that a person's social identity as defined by group membership—age, gender, religion, and race—has significance in situations in which attention is drawn to that identity. Steele found that when a person's social identity is attached to a negative stereotype, that person will tend to underperform in a manner consistent with the stereotype. He attributes the underperformance to a person's anxiety that he or she will confirm the stereotype. For example, in a study in which black students were asked to identify their race before taking a standardized test, they consistently scored lower than black students who were not asked to identify their race before the test. Their lower scores did not correspond with their previously identified abilities. In another study, women taking a math test were randomly divided into three groups. One group was asked to

answer a list of questions that clearly identified them as women; one was given a list that identified them as residents of the northeastern United States; and the third answered questions that identified them as students at an elite private college. The women who identified themselves as elite students consistently performed better on the test than the others—often even better than male students who have almost invariably scored higher than women (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002).

These results have been consistent in many other studies Steele and his colleagues have conducted. While Steele refers to this dynamic as stereotype threat, social justice educators term it *internalized oppression*—in which a person believes the negative information about his or her group and acts on it, fulfilling society's expectations. In light of this, consider the beliefs many teachers hold about children of color and the role these beliefs play in children's school performances. Constant focus on what is termed *the achievement gap* and pressure to perform on high-stakes standardized tests—or *else!*—surround these students and create a vicious cycle.

The high suicide rate for gay and lesbian youth is another example of internalized oppression in action. Stereotypes about gay people abound in the culture at large. Gay youth are often portrayed in limited and negative ways in the media, expelled from families, subjected to psychiatric treatments and medications, bullied in schools, coerced into programs to "cure" them, beaten, and killed. Many of these practices are seen as legitimate by much of dominant culture. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has estimated that 30–40% of gay youth have attempted suicide (2011). Queer youth internalize the message that they are abnormal and immoral and, believing society's messages that they are unworthy—that there is something deeply wrong with *them* rather than with *society*—seek to end their lives. While not all gay youth feel this way, the messages are unavoidable, and they must expend a great amount of effort—effort that heterosexual youth don't need to expend—in order to navigate this treatment and maintain pride.

Internalized oppression also causes members of a targeted group to devalue and more harshly criticize other members of their own group. Take, for example, the ways in which society blames women for their victimization when sexually assaulted. Some of the first questions both men and women ask a woman who was raped (assuming that we believe her) are where she was, what she was doing, and/or what she was wearing. We ask these questions in order to ascertain whether the assault was her fault, and we can

assume that she will be asking the same questions of herself. Many rape victims feel a deep sense of shame and responsibility. This is reinforced by the way in which society focuses on the culpability of the rape victim but not on the rapist. It is estimated that 60% of sexual assault crimes go unreported (American Medical Association, 1995) due to the social shame that rape victims feel, which is exacerbated by the treatment victims often receive in the male-dominated criminal justice system. The shame that male victims feel may be even greater, due to sexism and homophobia.

How many of us have seen warnings and safety tips for avoiding sexual assault? These warnings (even though they may be necessary) reinforce the idea that assault is preventable if women behave in specific ways.

These warnings also illustrate two other aspects of oppression. One, the dominant group (in this case, men) are *invisible*, and the focus is on the behavior of the *victims*—women—who must change their behavior to avoid assault, not men. Two, the dominant group enjoys privileges that the minoritized group cannot—in this case, freedom of movement and freedom of blame. It is estimated that 15 of 16 rapists never spend a day in jail (Reynolds, 1999).

Consider the following from <http://feminally.tumblr.com/>:

Sexual Assault Prevention Tips Guaranteed to Work!

- Don't put drugs in people's drinks in order to control their behavior.
- When you see someone walking by themselves, leave them alone!
- If you pull over to help someone with car problems, remember not to assault them!
- NEVER open an unlocked door or window-uninvited.
- If you are in an elevator and someone else gets in, DON'T ASSAULT THEM!
- Remember, people go to laundry to do their laundry, do not attempt to molest someone who is alone in a laundry room.
- USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM! If you are not able to stop yourself from assaulting people, ask a friend to stay with you while you are in public.

- Always be honest with people! Don't pretend to be a caring friend in order to gain the trust of someone you want to assault. Consider telling them you plan to assault them. If you don't communicate your intentions, the other person may take that as a sign that you do not plan to rape them.
- Don't forget: you can't have sex with someone unless they are awake!
- Carry a whistle! If you are worried you might assault someone "on accident" you can hand it to the person you are with, so they can blow it if you do.
- And, ALWAYS REMEMBER: if you didn't ask permission and then respect the answer the first time, you are committing a crime—no matter how "into it" others appear to be.

These tips are so provocative because they make the *perpetrators* of sexual assault *visible* by turning the usual focus on its head and, in so doing, challenge the taken for granted *privileges*—such as freedom of movement—that men enjoy at the expense of women.

Internalized dominance and oppression create observable social group patterns in members of dominant and minoritized groups. While there are always exceptions and acts of resistance, *overall* these patterns are well documented, recognizable, and predictable.

Positionality

Someone who does not see a pane of glass does not know that he does not see it. Someone who, being placed differently, does see it, does not know the other does not see it.

—Simone Weil (1987)

Positionality is the concept that our perspectives (what we see or don't see; what we know or don't know) are based on our *positions* within the social hierarchy. Positionality recognizes that where you stand in relation to others in society shapes what you can see and understand. For example, my position as an able-bodied person, in a society that devalues people with disabilities, limits my understanding of the barriers people with disabilities face. I simply don't "see" these barriers, in large part because I don't have to.

If I want to move through a building, I simply walk, take the stairs, or ride the elevator. If any of these means are unavailable to me due to a malfunction or repair work, I may actually feel irritated. This irritation is an indicator of my internalized dominance regarding my able-bodied status. I am so used to all of the privileges of access afforded by my status (including the privilege of being perceived and perceiving myself as normal)—that I have come to feel *entitled* to these privileges. My irritation indicates that I am not used to being "inconvenienced"; I take this privilege of access for granted. Because society devalues people with disabilities, I live segregated from them, so unless I know someone with a disability, I am unlikely to be aware of the barriers they face.

Positionality: The concept that our perceptions are shaped by our positions within society. These positions allow us to see and understand some social dynamics while obscuring others.

Conversely, people with disabilities are much more likely to be acutely aware of, and informed about, the barriers, issues, norms, policies, and practices in dominant society that limit their lives. They are also much more likely to be aware of my assumptions and the privileges that I take for granted. This is due to our different social *positionality*. However, due to the differential of power between our groups, my perspective (although it is the more limited one) will be the perspective that is validated. My group, from its position of privilege and limited awareness, is the group in the position to make policy and set norms that profoundly impact the lives of people with disabilities. Due to the devaluing of people with disabilities and the resultant social segregation and lack of physical access, people with disabilities are not generally sitting at the tables of power in society and therefore have little, if any, say in issues that affect their lives.

Remember: All individuals have prejudice and all individuals discriminate based on this prejudice. However, this is not the same as oppression. Only the dominant group is in the position to oppress the minoritized group.

Another familiar illustration of positionality and the power dynamics that inform our perspectives is the story of Columbus's discovery of America. The ad in Figure 11 uses the Columbus story as the backdrop to sell Costa Rican vacations. We can assume that the intended audience is white (as is the family featured in the ad). The copy says, "Costa Rica: Constantly Being Discovered Since 1502." Whose racial perspective is reflected in the idea that the continent was "discovered" when Europeans arrived? Whose perspective is rendered invisible? Which racial group may be invested in this story? Which racial group may be invested in challenging it? Asking questions such as these develops a clearer picture of how *what you know* is connected to *who you are* in the society at large and *where you stand* within that society; your *positionality*.

Figure 11: Costa Rica Ad

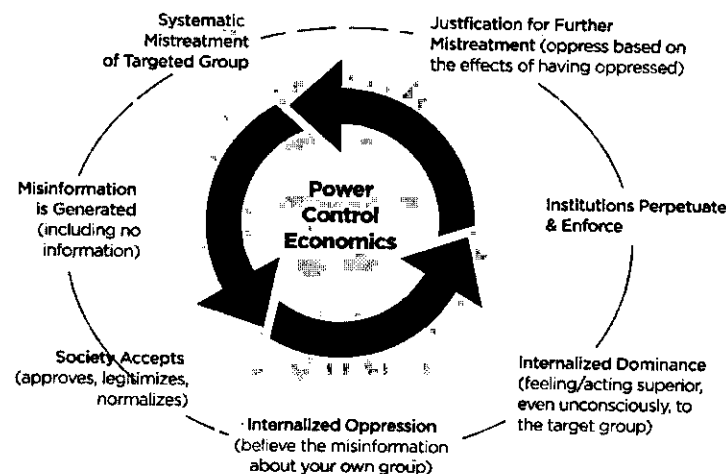


Chapter 5: The Cycle of Oppression

My neighborhood growing up was not diverse at all. Everyone is equal. There is no race that is better than another. I've never felt like my race was important in shaping my life. It's never been in my mind. It was never a limitation or an advantage or anything (ASR).

One way to conceptualize oppression is through the image of a cycle, as illustrated in Figure 12. The result of this cycle is the systematic mistreatment of a minoritized group.

Figure 12: Cycle of Oppression



The Generation of Misinformation

The first dynamic that sets the cycle in motion is *misinformation* about and *misrepresentation* of a minoritized group. The group is presented in limited, superficial, and negative ways. Take, for example, the representation of black men on television. When we see black men, it is most often either in sports (and concentrated in specific sports such as basketball and football), or associated with the criminal justice system, be it in the role of criminal or

DiAngelo, R. (2012). What
does it mean to be white?
Developing white racial
literacy. New York: Peter
Lang Publishers