

of whether or not we personally agree with these teachings, we all receive them through social institutions like schools, government, and the mass media.

For example, even if as parents we want to challenge traditional gender roles and intentionally avoid dressing our daughters in pink or sons in blue, we still receive the message in mainstream culture whenever we watch TV, walk through the toy aisles in stores, or order a Happy Meal at McDonald's and are asked if we want the "girl" or "boy" toy. In fact, many parents who try to avoid traditional gender teachings find it to be a losing battle, given the relentless messages children receive from everything else around them; we are constantly being pressured to follow the norms of society.

The social groups we are born or develop into are part of the frames of our glasses. For example, when we are born we are socialized according to whether we are male or female, rich or poor, able-bodied or with a disability. While group divisions are not in reality this clear-cut, the macro level of society organizes groups into simple either/or groupings (called *binaries*). For every social group, there is an opposite group. One cannot learn what a social group is, without also learning what the group is *not*. Thus the frames of our glasses are the big picture ideas about social groups. Although there are many, the primary groups that we name here are: race, class, gender, sexuality, ability status/exceptionality, religion, and nationality.

Figure 3.3 is intended to help readers begin the process of identifying several of their key social group memberships. Despite these limitations, our intention is that readers use this chart for the purpose of beginning to understand the relevance of race/ethnicity in society at large.

We develop our ideas about people in terms of their race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, ability, and citizenship from the culture that surrounds us, and many of these ideas are "below the surface" or below the conscious level. But we all rely on shared understandings about these social groups because we receive messages collectively about them from our culture. The frameworks we use to make sense of race, class, or gender are taken for granted and often invisible to us.

Race and ethnicity are examples of how complex and interrelated these categories can be. While race and ethnicity are related in important ways and often used interchangeably, they

Figure 3.3. Group Identities

Group	Group identities
	<i>It is unavoidable that some groups have not been listed. If your group has been left out, please write it in.</i>
Race	Perceived as Person of Color Perceived as White Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean ancestry) South Asian (e.g., Indian, Sri Lankan, Nepalese ancestry) Black (e.g., African, Caribbean ancestry) Bi- or multiracial (parents and/or grandparents of mixed racial ancestry) Indigenous (e.g., Cherokee, Inuit, Dakota ancestry) Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (e.g., Samoan, Guamanian, Fijian ancestry) White (e.g., Irish, French, Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry) Hispanic or Latino/a (e.g., Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican ancestry)
Race detailed	Poor, Working Poor, Working Class, Lower Middle Class, Middle Class, Professional Class, Upper Class, Owning/Ruling Class
Class	
Gender	Cis-Women, Cis-Men, Transgender, Genderqueer
Sexuality	Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Two Spirit, Heterosexual
Religion	For example: Hindu, Buddhist, Jew, Christian, Muslim, Atheist
Ability	For example: Able-bodied, people with physical disabilities, people with developmental disabilities, exceptionality
Nationality	Indigenous, Immigrant (perceived non-status), Citizen (perceived)

are not interchangeable. Race is a socially constructed system of classifying humans based on particular phenotypical characteristics (skin color, hair texture, and bone structure). *Ethnicity* refers to a group of people bound by a common language, culture, spiritual tradition, and/or ancestry. Ethnic groups can bridge national borders and still be one group (such as the Cree community, which straddles the United States and Canada). At the same time, ethnic groups can live within the same national borders and not share the same ethnic identity. For example, "British" refers to people of English, Scottish, and Welsh ancestry who live in the United Kingdom of Great Britain. However the English, Scottish, and Welsh are distinct ethnic groups. As well, British can refer to citizens of Great Britain who

✓ PERSPECTIVE CHECK: We have based the list in Figure 3.3 on categories of identification that are collected by the Canadian and U.S. governments. However, these categorizations do not reflect the complexities of race and ethnicity as experienced in society. For example, in Figure 3.3 we have included "Latino/Hispanic" under the category of race despite the fact that this is not technically a singular racial group. It includes many racial groups. We have included "sexuality" because of the very real racialized differences that exist for people who are identified as "Latino/Hispanic."

may have racial and ethnic heritage other than English, Scottish, or Welsh—such as African, Asian, or Arab.

As this example shows, race and ethnicity interact in complex ways with language and citizenship. For those new to the study of critical social justice, mastering these complexities is of secondary importance. Of primary importance is the ability to understand these categories as *socially constructed* and reflective of a particular political and cultural context. This does not mean that we dismiss categories of race and ethnicity because they are unstable; rather we must understand the larger dynamics that their instability is related to and the impact of those larger dynamics on our lives (this will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7).

There are also important interactions between race and ethnicity, and internal and external dynamics of identity; how one personally *identifies* versus how one is *identified* by others. In other words, how I see myself versus how others perceive me. While how we see ourselves and how others see us may not be the same, they are in fact, inseparable, because how our identities develop is shaped by how others see and respond to us. Sociologist Charles Cooley (1922) called this interconnection the “looking glass self” to capture the idea that we come to know who we are in large part through the process of what others reflect back to us. The looking glass self includes the concept that the process of learning to know who we are is shaped by learning who we are *not*.

We now return to the analogy of the “frame of reference” glasses. As we said previously, the lenses constitute the individual (micro) perspective. These are our unique experiences that make us “one of a kind”—our birth order, our family, our personality—the “prescription” lens that fits in the frame. Yet no one is *simply* an individual. We are all members of multiple social groupings and widely circulating social messages about those groupings. To understand your personal cultural glasses, you have to explore the interplay or relationship between your frames and your lenses. A primary challenge in developing critical social justice literacy is to understand the relationship between you as an individual and the social groups you belong to; the interplay of positionality. From a critical social justice framework, when we say the words “men,” “women,” “heterosexuals,” “middle class,” and so on, we are speaking about specific social group positions and histories.

If we are resisting the very notion of having to identify ourselves in terms of social groups, such as our race or gender, this too provides insight into our collective socialization. In Western society we are socialized to prioritize our collectivity. Yet, although we *are* individuals, we *are also*—and perhaps fundamentally—members of social groups. These group memberships shape us as profoundly, if not more so, than any unique characteristic we may claim to possess.

Consider how one of the key aspects of individuality is one’s preference for certain food, music, and dress styles. However, these preferences are never simply one’s internally-driven likes or dislikes. It is no coincidence that popular shows of the

ly (whether it be the *Twilight* movie franchise or the Netflix series *Stranger Things*) influence which names rise to the top of “most popular name” lists. Think back to when other icons figures from popular culture influenced hairstyles of the time (Pam Drier, Farrah Fawcett, Jennifer Aniston, Justin Bieber). Conversely, seeking names that are “different” is also a function of culture—you are still reacting to the culture at large. Without the popular names, your different name (different from what?) would not have the same meaning.

The point is, while parents may have preferences for particular names, and any individual may have a preference for a particular hairstyle, it is not simply a matter of preference. There are predictable patterns of group behavior we can observe and study. And we can make predictions about your preferences based on your class, race, gender, and so on.

Returning to our opening vignette, hopefully you now have a better idea of what was meant by the instructor’s statements when she said for example that, “Members of the middle and upper classes have an easier time getting into universities and getting jobs.” The instructor was not making claims about each *individual person* in these groups, but about *patterns among social groups*. These patterns are longstanding, measurable, and well documented. The fact that these kinds of statements often cause defensiveness speaks to the way they challenge Western deviation of the individual over the group. We have been taught that social group memberships such as race, class, and gender do not and should not matter, and thus must be minimized and denied.

Specifically, the instructor is challenging a societal norm by moving past individual difference and instead focusing on shared dynamics between members of social groups. She is also challenging a norm connected to our elevation of the individual—the idea that people should be seen as unique, and thus it is inappropriate to generalize. And finally, she is naming the dominant group in each of these examples, which violates assumptions that dominant groups are neutral and that difference lies with the “other.”

D **Dominant Group(s):** The group(s) at the top of the social hierarchy. In any relationship between groups that define one another (men/women, able-bodied/disabled, young/old, White/Black), the dominant group is the group that is valued more highly. Dominant groups set the norms by which the minoritized group is judged. Dominant groups have greater access to the resources of society and benefit from the existence of the inequality.



CHAPTER 4

Prejudice and Discrimination

"I was taught never to judge a book by its cover."

This chapter explains two key interrelated terms: prejudice and discrimination. We explain that prejudice and discrimination cannot be avoided; we all hold prejudices and we all discriminate based on our prejudices. We argue that the first step in minimizing discrimination is to be able to identify (rather than deny) our prejudices.

Vocabulary to practice using: prejudice; discrimination; implicit bias

Imagine that you are on a hiring committee to identify the best candidate to join your school faculty. Ms. Hardy, the principal who chairs the committee, reports that there are too many applicants for the one position and that the committee needs to thin out the applicant pool. As she is distributing the files for review, she says, "Oh, here's a male applicant. We definitely want to consider this one, since we have so few male teachers at our school." As she says this, she is thinking, *I really want to get some male teachers in here; just the other day a parent was complaining that there weren't any male role models for the boys.*

Liz, a teacher on the committee, thinks, *Oh great, a man. That's all we need. He'll probably be the vice principal by next year,* and says, "Yes, but there are many other dynamics associated with what a candidate brings."

Wendy, another teacher, thinks, *I hope he's gay; men teaching at the elementary level usually are. He'll probably be a blast to work with,* and says, "Yeah, we should look closely at his application. And it would be so great to have more diversity around sexual orientation too."

Mary, another teacher, thinks, *Uh-oh, he's probably gay . . . that's going to be an issue for a lot of the parents,* and says, "Yes, but we should consider how the candidate fits the culture of our students' families. In the past, we've had problems around gay teachers."

Liz exclaims, "Whoa, this is prejudice!"

Everyone is stunned by this charge. Wendy retorts, "That's a terrible accusation! We have a process here, and P . . . es that we will follow to ensure that

every candidate is evaluated fairly. Besides, Mary and I don't have a prejudiced bone in our bodies!"

What is Prejudice?

This vignette illustrates some of the many complicated dimensions associated with critical social justice. While most people want to be fair, we can't help but have preconceived notions—prejudices—about other people based on their social groups (in this case, the candidates' gender). At the same time, we often feel deeply hurt and insulted when someone suggests that we have prejudices at all, let alone that they are showing. To gain a more complex understanding of the dynamics in the above vignette, we must first examine the relationship between two interrelated concepts: *prejudice* and *discrimination*.

Prejudice is learned prejudgment toward social others and refers to *internal* thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and assumptions based on the groups to which they belong. While everyone has prejudices based on distinctive experiences that are unique to them—for example, someone got into a legal dispute with a cashier and now doesn't trust cashiers—here we are concerned with the collective prejudices we learn from the culture at large about our own and other social groups.

These prejudices can be either positive or negative. However, they are always unfair, because they are not earned by the individual but granted or imposed based on ideas about the group that the individual belongs to. For example, *I prefer to teach math to Chinese heritage students because I assume they will do well on the math test, and I don't like to teach math to White female students because I assume they will do poorly.* While the prejudice I have toward the Chinese heritage students appears to be positive, it is still unfair in that it isn't earned, will interfere with my ability to make valid assessments, and sets one racial group up against others.

Prejudice manifests in attitudes about an individual, but it is based on our ideas about the group to which that individual belongs. Prejudice is part of how we learn to sort people into categories that make sense to us (boy/girl, old/young, rich/poor). Although this is a process necessary for learning, our categorizations are not neutral. We are socialized to perceive and value these categories differently.

For example, take the categories of "attractive" and "unattractive." While there is some variation in opi . . . between people, on the level of collective socialization

there are sanctioned norms of beauty constantly communicated to us through major institutions such as the entertainment industry. Media-based representations present a consistent image of who the attractive people are, what they look like, and what we can do to look more like them (if you doubt this, just scan the magazine rack at your local grocery store).

Most of us are acutely aware that there are social benefits that go with being in the “attractive” group and social penalties for being in the “unattractive” group. These benefits and penalties are communicated to us *explicitly*—effusive praise for a celebrity’s beauty, magazine covers featuring the “100 Most Beautiful People,” the “20 Hottest Bodies,” the open ridicule of unattractive people, more praise for us when we “dress up”—and *implicitly* through larger salaries, career advancement, better evaluations, and other research-documented benefits that accrue to those considered attractive (Hamermesh & Parker, 2005; Rhode, 2010).

These definitions are not natural but are specific to a given cultural context. They change over time and our perceptions change with them, indicating the learned nature of our prejudices. For example, in the United States Marilyn Monroe was once considered one of the most beautiful women in the world. However, while she might still epitomize the White, blonde ideal of feminine beauty, she would be considered overweight today and therefore would not have the beauty status that she held over 50 years ago.

Prejudices begin as stereotypes. While many use these terms interchangeably, there are important nuances. *Stereotypes* refer to reduced or simplified characteristics attributed to a group. For example, if we ask someone to describe Americans and Canadians, they may answer that Americans are industrious, independent, and like fast food, while Canadians are polite, love hockey, and end their sentences with “eh.” When we ask what elementary school teachers are like, we may have ideas that they are nurturing and loving. These kinds of simplifications are either a set of characteristics *attributed to a group* (elementary school teachers are nurturing), or a feature of some members of a group that *stands out* (Canadian speech, American eating habits).

People often say that there is always a kernel of truth to stereotypes, but this belief has more to do with the ways in which stereotypes work and less to do with their validity. For example, although some Canadians end some of their sentences with “eh,” most Canadians do not. Yet this distinction is what helps us make sense of the category “Canadian” as distinct from the category “American.” This is especially easy to see in the realm of media where having, for example, a character say “eh” establishes that character as Canadian. For an American watching these movies, this stereotype is reinforced again and again. Because many Americans may not know many Canadians, we don’t have much else to draw on and over time come to believe this is how Canadians talk. The stereotype is now formed in our minds and will appear to be true because we are drawing on the fixed representation we have seen so regularly. When we encounter people who don’t fit the

stereotype, we either don’t notice or we view these people as exceptions. On the other hand, when we encounter people who do fit the stereotype, even if we encounter them very rarely, they stand out to us and reinforce the stereotype as true. Therefore, if we hold this stereotype and visit Canada, we will notice any Canadian we hear say “eh” and disregard the countless Canadians we meet who don’t, thus reinforcing our belief in this particular stereotype.

Prejudice comes into play when we add values to our stereotypes. Let’s put stereotypes together with values, using the example of “elementary school teacher.” If I am a parent going to meet my son’s 2nd-grade teacher for the first time, I would expect to meet a female (as the vast majority of elementary teachers are female). If instead I meet a male, I may wonder if he is gay (a common stereotype about male elementary school teachers) and worry that if he is, he will be an inappropriate role model for my son (a common prejudice about male elementary school teachers and the values associated with those stereotypes in our culture, leading to a prejudicial attitude that my son’s gay teacher will be an unsuitable role model).

Notice how conceptions about the teacher are interwoven in important ways with conceptions about gender roles. These conceptions are important because they are the basis of our evaluations for what is “normal”; every teacher we encounter who does not match our internal definition of “teacher” will be evaluated differently than the “normal” teachers who do match them. These evaluations don’t just distinguish between who is deemed normal and who isn’t, but also influence our assessments of other important social values such as character. When we assign character values, our stereotypes have moved into prejudice.

Many of us think that we don’t hold prejudicial thoughts against people. Because we think this, we see ourselves as free of prejudice. But the process is much more complicated. The reality is that no one can avoid prejudice because it is built into our socialization. All humans have prejudices, but they are so normalized and taken for granted that they are often very difficult to identify. This is one of the challenges of critical social justice literacy: developing the critical thinking that would enable us to bring our prejudices to the surface and reflect upon and challenge them. Yet society tells us that it is bad to have prejudices, and thus we feel pressure to deny them.

However, because social acceptance of prejudices varies over time, we don’t feel compelled to deny all of our prejudices. In fact, when we hold prejudices against certain groups—groups that it is socially acceptable to hold prejudices

✓ PERSPECTIVE CHECK: If I am a gay parent, or have close relationships with many gay people whom I advocate for, I am more likely to be informed and educated on the issues and thus not have the same worry.

against—we often don't see them as prejudices at all, but as facts. For example, not too long ago it was socially acceptable for White people to openly admit holding prejudicial beliefs about Black people, which they saw as justified because most White people believed that Black racial inferiority was simply true. Today this belief is understood to be untrue, and to admit to holding such a belief is no longer considered acceptable in most circles. However, admitting to prejudices against people considered overweight (especially women) is currently acceptable. And in fact, not only are these prejudices acceptable, but many magazines, for example, openly ridicule women perceived as overweight.

While there are health risks to obesity, the beauty and entertainment industries are invested in selling us the idea of fat as ugly, as undisciplined, and as worthy of contempt. These ideas allow us to rationalize our prejudice. The economic interest in maintaining these prejudices is so deep that they are marketed to all people. Consequently, girls who have not even reached puberty are socialized into a culture of dieting, and very few people feel satisfied with their bodies regardless of their size or health (Grogan, 2016; Levin & Kilbourne, 2008). These industries relentlessly present the image of the ideal body, and this ideal has become increasingly unattainable and in some contexts (such as the modeling industry) unhealthy. In fact, the image is so unrealistic that the magazine cover models themselves don't actually look like the images presented; images are routinely digitally modified to reshape their bodies, decrease their weight, enhance their breasts, remove their pores, and more. This leads to deep body dissatisfaction, which in turn translates into billions of dollars for the beauty and diet industries.

What is Discrimination?

The term *discrimination* has multiple meanings, including having discriminating (or refined) taste in music or food. In critical social justice studies, we use it to refer to action based on prejudices toward social others. How we think about groups of people determines how we act toward them; Discrimination occurs when we act on our prejudices. Our prejudice toward others guides our thoughts, organizes our values, and influences our actions. These prejudices, when left unexamined, necessarily shape our behaviors. Once we act on our prejudices, we are *discriminating*. Acts of discrimination can include ignoring, avoiding, excluding, ridicule, jokes, slander, threats, and violence.

Consider this example: You are at a play and you notice that the person in the seat next to yours is fumbling with her program. You turn to look at her and realize that she is blind, which is signaled to you by the white cane by her side. Once



Discrimination: Action based on prejudice toward social others. When we act on our prejudices, we are discriminating.

you realize that she is blind, she is placed in your mind into a new social category that triggers a new set of possible responses from her. These responses could range from ignoring (because you are not sure of the proper way to communicate with someone who is blind) or avoidance (if you find her blindness disconcerting), to an offer of help based on an assumption that she will need it. If you decide to offer your assistance, you may, without even realizing it, speak more slowly than you normally would to an adult stranger, reflecting a common (but unaware) assumption that a visual impairment also implies cognitive impairments.

While you might insist that you would never interact differently with a blind person than with anyone else, research supports the prediction that you would (Dovidio, Click, & Rudman, 2005; Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). That doesn't make you a bad person; our prejudices and the discriminatory behaviors they produce are often not consciously known to us. Nor do we have to be aware of them in order for them and their effects to be real.

The prejudice that leads to the differential treatment we name here—either ignoring/avoiding the blind woman or offering unsolicited help and speaking as if to a child—is not unique to us, and can be predicted precisely because of that fact. The messages that reinforce prejudice toward blind people are everywhere and affect all of us. This prejudice in turn informs our behavior. Consider representations of people with disabilities in media. Inspirational heroes are valorized for having “overcome” the tragedy of disability; horror movies wherein the villain’s ability to scare victims is connected to “freaky” eyes or disfigurements of the body; and admonishments to children to avoid activities that could cause them to go blind (implying that this would be the worst possible condition to have).

When we add the fact that most sighted people don't know any blind people (because in our society most blind people are separated out and sent to special schools and workplaces), you ensure the likelihood of problematic interactions. Notice that blind people (and people with other perceived exceptions) are both highly visible in the ways their blindness is amplified in films and popular culture, and at the same time invisible in that they are often separated from the mainstream. This dynamic sets us up to rely on misinformation and starts the cycle of prejudice and discrimination. We are not saying every person will discriminate in these specific ways against the woman in the theater, but many will. In addition, given the dynamics of prejudice and discrimination, our own personal assessment of whether we will is simply not reliable.

✓ PERSPECTIVE CHECK:

The example discussed in the text assumes the perspective of an able-bodied person who has not thought deeply about ableism. If you come from the perspective of a person with a disability (or have a person with a disability in your life whom you advocate for), you are more likely to be informed on the issue and thus interact more constructively.

All Humans Have Prejudice and Discriminate

Just as all people have prejudices, learned from socialization, all people discriminate. So, the blind woman in our previous example may also have prejudices against us because we are sighted. Based on her previous experiences with sighted people, she may assume that we are ignorant about people with disabilities and that we will be condescending toward her. Thus if we attempt to speak to her, she may ignore us; she is discriminating against us based on her prejudice toward us. However, her prejudice and discrimination against us will not have the same impact as ours against her will (we will discuss why in Chapters 5 and 6).

If we all have our prejudices, can we avoid discriminating? Without conscious effort, this is highly unlikely; because prejudice informs how we view others, it necessarily informs how we act toward others. This action may be subtle—as subtle as avoidance and disinterest. But this lack of interest is not accidental or benign; it is socialized and results in not developing relationships—in this case, with people with disabilities. However, while we can't avoid prejudice, we can work to recognize our prejudices and gain new information and ways of thinking that will inform more just actions.

A key aspect to challenging our prejudices is challenging the social segregation that is built into the culture; the more educated we become about people who are different from us and the more relationships we build with them, the more likely we are to have constructive responses when interacting with other members of their group. This education requires more than knowing one or two individuals in the past and in a limited way, such as having a coworker or neighbor who is blind. If we engage in ongoing study and education, while also building wide-ranging and authentic relationships with people who are blind, we are more likely to have an informed rather than superficial response to the woman in the theater.

In order to get a sense of the power of our deep-structure, below-the-surface socialization in terms of our ideas about and actions toward others, consider this thought experiment. You are going about your day and engaging in conversations with the following people: your friends, your romantic partner, your children, and your supervisor. You might be joking with your friends, sweet-talking with your romantic partner, speaking with formality to your supervisor, and talking irritably with your children. Now add a layer of context: your friends in the classroom before class versus on the weekend at the bar; your romantic partner while walking across campus versus alone in your dorm room; your children when they are celebrating an accomplishment versus struggling with a disappointment; and your supervisor when you are receiving positive feedback on your work versus when you are explaining a series of missed deadlines.

In each of these scenarios you are weighing the value of the social group of the other person in relation to the value of your own social group. These relational values inform how you speak—your tone, the words you use, and even your facial expressions. The navigations we make are the result of our socialization

about groups and do not generally occur at the conscious level. You don't need to pause and figure out how to switch gears from your friends to your supervisor; your awareness of the value relations are so internalized that you shift gears effortlessly.

Awareness of ourselves as socialized members of a number of intersecting groups within a particular culture in a particular time and place (social location or positionality) will increase our critical social justice literacy. We need to see the general patterns of our socialization and be aware of ourselves in shifting contexts. In other words, we need to step back and become aware of ourselves shifting gears and examine the assumptions underlying these shifts and the behaviors they set in motion. When interacting cross-culturally with members of unfamiliar groups, the codes we rely on are more likely to be based on stereotypical assumptions and messages. A key goal of critical social justice literacy is to raise our awareness of these patterned codes. When we are more conscious of them, we are more equipped to change them when they are based upon misinformation.

Returning to the vignette of the search committee that opens this chapter, we can see that this scenario illustrates several dynamics related to the key concepts of prejudice and discrimination. First, every person in the room had prejudiced about a male elementary school teacher. These prejudices were both negative (the candidate is less suitable because he is male) and positive (the candidate is more suitable because he is male). While the members of the hiring committee necessarily also held stereotypes, assumptions, and value judgments (prejudices) about female teachers, these prejudices were invisible, unremarkable, and taken for granted because female teachers are the norm in the elementary grades. Only the male teacher stood out to them. In other words, for someone to be seen as *not* suitable for the job based on their social group membership, someone else has to be seen as suitable for the job, based on their social group membership.

Second, each person tried to present this prejudice in a way that she believed was more socially acceptable than simply stating it bluntly. This indicates her awareness of the belief that it is wrong to be prejudiced.

And third, when someone pointed out the prejudice, others became defensive and insisted that no one in the group had any prejudice whatsoever. This illustrates the belief that it is possible to avoid prejudices altogether. Mary's final statement that they had policies and procedures that would prevent any prejudicial evaluations leads us to the next chapter.