What does it mean to be an American? Is the United States splintering into separate racial and ethnic groups? Is there a limit to the amount of diversity our society can tolerate? Should the number of immigrants entering the United States be reduced? Should Spanish become an official second language? Should multiculturalism be a part of the public school curriculum? Should everyone celebrate Black History Month?

These kinds of questions are crucial, but they are not new. Our past is punctuated with debates—often passionate and frequently violent—about unity and diversity, and the continuing controversies suggest that these issues are far from settled. Indeed, virtually every question that arises in the public forum has some implication for group relations, and the recent high levels of immigration have re-energized concern for the integrity of American culture and the primacy of the English language. Today, as in the past, some argue that our diversity is a great strength, the fuel that propels American energy and creativity. Others, now as before, see our differences as a liability that saps our strength and weakens our solidarity. Does our multiplicity lead us forward or hold us back? Should we emphasize our unity or celebrate our diversity?

Relationships between the larger society and the myriad American minority groups remain a primary issue—perhaps the primary issue—in American life. What kind of society are we becoming? What should it mean to be
American? In the past, opportunity and success have been far more available to white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males than to members of other groups. Most Americans, even the favored males, would agree that this definition of American is far too narrow, but how inclusive should the definition be? How wide can the limits be stretched before national unity is threatened? How narrow can they be before the desire to preserve our distinct heritages is unjustly and unnecessarily stifled?

THE INCREASING VARIETY OF AMERICAN MINORITY GROUPS

The issues raised in the introductory paragraphs are especially urgent because America is in a period of increasing diversity, largely because of high rates of immigration. Over the past three decades, the number of immigrants arriving in the United States has more than tripled, rising from less than 300,000 a year to almost one million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002, p. 10). The current wave of immigrants includes groups from all over the globe. Can our society deal successfully with this diversity of cultures, languages, and races?

The concerns sparked by immigration are compounded by a variety of long-standing, unresolved minority issues and grievances. Charts and graphs presented in Chapters 5 through 9 show persistent gaps in income, poverty rates, and other measures of affluence and equality between minority groups and national norms. In many ways, the problems and concerns of African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans today are just as formidable as they were a generation ago.

As one way of gauging the dimensions of diversity, consider the five groups listed in Exhibit 1.1. Before examining the size and growth patterns of these groups, consider the labels used to identify them. Although commonly used, the labels are arbitrary. None of these groups has clear or unambiguous boundaries, and they do not divide the U.S. population into homogeneous subunits. Two people selected from within any one of these categories might be as different from each other as any two people selected from different categories. The people included in each category may share some physical or cultural traits, but they will also vary by social class, religion, gender, and in thousands of other ways. For example, people classified as Asians and Pacific Islanders represent scores of different national and linguistic backgrounds (Japanese, Samoans, Vietnamese, Pakistanis, and so forth), and the category “Native Americans, Eskimos, Aleuts” includes people from hundreds of different tribes and reservations. The groups named in Exhibit 1.1 appear frequently in government reports and in the professional literature of the social sciences, and, for the sake of convenience, the labels will be used in this text. We need to recognize, however, that the names are arbitrary conventions that should never be mistaken for unchanging or “natural” divisions.

Turning to the Exhibit itself, the relative sizes of the groups are presented for 1980 and 2000, and group sizes are estimated for two future dates. The increasing diversity of U.S. society is reflected in the declining predominance of non-Hispanic whites from 1980 through the middle of the 21st century. As the proportional share of white Americans declines, other groups will grow in relative size. Asian and Pacific Islander populations are projected to increase dramatically over the next half century, more than doubling their proportion of the total population. Hispanic Americans will also double their relative size. They already have surpassed African Americans and became the largest U.S. minority group in 2001 (Schmitt, 2001). Finally, African Americans and Native Americans will increase in numbers but will remain at roughly their present proportional share of the population.

The projections into the future are only educated guesses, but they presage profound change for the United States. Within the next five decades, the total percentage of minority group Americans will increase from less than 30% to almost 50%. Our society will grow more diverse racially, culturally, and linguistically. The United States will become less white, less European, and more like the world as a whole. Some see these changes as threats to traditional white middle-class American
values and lifestyles. Others see them as an opportunity for the emergence of other equally attractive and legitimate value systems.

Also note that, even though the categories in Exhibit 1.1 are broad, they do not provide a place for the growing numbers of Americans who come from multiple races and/or cultures. Between 1980 and 2000, the number of “mixed” marriages (i.e., those uniting people of different racial backgrounds and those uniting Hispanics with non-Hispanics) doubled in number (from 1.5 million to 3.2 million) as well as in the percentage of all marriages (from 3.1% to 5.7%) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002, p. 47). The children of these marriages represent a small but growing group in American society. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, about 6.4 million people (2.3% of the total population) classified themselves in two racial or ethnic groups, and another 450,000 people claimed membership in three or more groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001a.). Obviously, the number of “mixed” Americans will continue to grow as the number of “mixed” marriages increases, and this group will assume an increasingly prominent role in the daily life of society.

THE GOALS OF THIS TEXT

These first few paragraphs have raised a lot of questions. The purpose of this text is to help you develop some answers and some thoughtful, informed positions on these issues, guided by the formidable demographic trends identified in the previous section and by a careful consideration of the issues and grievances of American minority groups. You should be aware from the beginning that the questions addressed here are complex and that the answers we seek are not obvious or easy. Indeed, there is no guarantee that we as a society will be able or willing to resolve all the problems of intergroup relations in the United States. However, we will never make progress in this area unless we confront the issues honestly and with an accurate base of knowledge and understanding. Certainly, these issues will not resolve themselves or disappear if they are ignored.

In the course of our investigation, we will rely on sociology and other social sciences for concepts, theory, and information. Our primary emphasis will be macrosociological. This means that we will emphasize the larger social structures (institutions, social classes) and large-scale social processes (group competition, assimilation) as opposed to more micro-level phenomena such as individual prejudice. Chapters 1 and 2 introduce and define many of the ideas that will guide our investigation. Chapters 3 and 4 explore how relations between the dominant group and minority groups have evolved in American society, using African Americans as a primary case study. Chapters 5–9 apply the concepts and theories developed in the first four chapters to the present situation of the major U.S. minority groups. In Chapter 10, we consider group relations in a number of other societies, and in the final chapter we summarize the analysis, reach
some conclusions, and speculate about the future of group relations in our society.

WHAT IS A MINORITY GROUP?
Before we can begin to sort out the issues, we need common definitions and a common vocabulary for discussion. We begin with the term minority group. Taken literally, the mathematical connotation of this term is a bit misleading because it implies that minority groups are small. In reality, a minority group can be quite large and can even be a numerical majority of the population. Women, for example, are sometimes considered to be a separate minority group, but they are a numerical majority of the U.S. population. In South Africa, as in many nations created by European colonization, whites are a numerical minority (less than 30% of the population), but despite recent changes, they remain the most powerful and affluent group.

Minority status has more to do with the distribution of resources and power than with simple numbers. The definition of minority group used in this book is based on Wagley and Harris (1958). According to this definition, a minority group has five characteristics:

- The members of the group experience a pattern of disadvantage or inequality.
- The members of the group share a visible trait or characteristic that differentiates them from other groups.
- The minority group is a self-conscious social unit.
- Membership in the group usually is determined at birth.
- Members tend to marry within the group.

The first two of these traits—inequality and visibility—are the most important and will occupy most of our attention in the material that follows.

Inequality
Stratification, or the unequal distribution of valued goods and services, is a basic feature of society. Every human society, except perhaps the simplest hunter-gatherer societies, is stratified to some degree; that is, the resources of the society are distributed so that some get more and others less. Societies are divided into horizontal layers (or strata), often called social classes, which differ from one another in the amount of valued goods and services they command. Many criteria (such as education, age, gender, and talent) may affect a person’s social class position and his or her access to resources and opportunity. Minority group membership is one of these criteria, and it has had a powerful impact on the distribution of resources in the United States and many other societies.

Inequality—some pattern of disability and disadvantage—is the most important defining characteristic of a minority group. The nature of the disability and the degree of disadvantage can be highly variable, ranging from exploitation, slavery, and genocide at one extreme to such “slight” irritants as a lack of desks for left-handed students or a policy of racial exclusion at an expensive country club at the other extreme. (Note, however, that you might not agree that the irritant is slight if you are a left-handed student awkwardly taking notes at a right-handed desk or if you are a golf aficionado who happens to be African American.) Whatever its scope or severity, whether it extends to wealth, jobs, housing, political power, police protection, or health care, or opportunities for upward mobility, the pattern of disadvantage is the essence of minority group membership.

In this section, we briefly consider some theories about the nature and dimensions of stratification. Then, we focus on how minority group status relates to stratification. During this discussion, several key concepts and themes used throughout this book are identified.

Theoretical Perspectives
Sociology and the other social sciences have been concerned with stratification and human inequality since the formation of the discipline in the 19th century. An early and important contributor to our understanding
of the nature and significance of social inequality was Karl Marx, the noted social philosopher. Half a century later, sociologist Max Weber, a central figure in the development of the discipline, critiqued and elaborated on Marx’s view of social inequality. We will consider their views as well as those of Gerhard Lenski, a contemporary sociologist whose ideas about the influence of economic and technological development on social stratification have considerable relevance when comparing societies and understanding their evolution.

**Karl Marx.** Karl Marx is best known for writing *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 (Marx & Engels, 1848/1967). He was also the primary architect of a political, economic, and social philosophy that has played a major role in world affairs for nearly 150 years. Marxism is more than just a form of communism; it is a complex theory of history and social change in which inequality is a central concept and concern.

Marx argued that the most important source of inequality in society was the system of economic production. More specifically, he focused on the *means of production*, or the materials, tools, resources, and organizations by which the society produces and distributes goods and services. In an agricultural society, the means of production include land, draft animals, and plows. In an industrial society, the means of production include factories, commercial enterprises, banks, and transportation systems such as railroads.

All societies include two main social classes that struggle over the means of production. One class owns or controls the means of production. In the case of an industrial society, Marx called this elite or ruling class capitalists or the *bourgeoisie*. The other class is the working class, or the *proletariat*. Marx believed that conflict between these classes was inevitable and that the ultimate result of this class struggle would be the victory of the working class, followed by the creation of a utopian society without exploitation, coercion, or inequality: in other words, a classless society.

Marxism has been extensively revised and updated since the 19th century. Still, modern social science owes a great deal to Marx’s views on inequality and his insights on class struggle and social conflict. As you shall see, Marxism remains an important body of work and a rich source of insight into group relations in industrial society.

**Max Weber.** One of Marx’s major critics was Max Weber, a German sociologist who did most of his work around the turn of the 20th century. Weber thought that Marx’s view of inequality was too narrow. Whereas Marx saw social class as a matter of economic position or relationship to the means of production, Weber noted that inequality involved more dimensions than just the economic. Individuals could be members of the elite in some ways but not in others. For example, an aristocratic family that has fallen on hard financial times might belong to the elite in terms of family lineage but not in terms of wealth. Or, to use a more contemporary example, a major figure in the illegal drug trade could enjoy substantial wealth but be held in low esteem otherwise.

Weber expanded on Marx’s view of inequality by identifying three separate stratification systems. First, there is economic inequality based on ownership or control of property, wealth, and income. This is similar to Marx’s concept of class, and in fact, Weber used the term *class* to identify this form of inequality.

A second system of stratification revolves around differences in *prestige* between groups, or the amount of honor, esteem, or respect given to us by others. Class position is one factor that affects the amount of prestige enjoyed by a person. Other factors might include family lineage, athletic ability, and physical appearance. In the United States and other societies, prestige is affected by the groups to which people belong, and members of minority groups typically receive less prestige than members of the dominant group.

Weber’s third stratification system is *power*, or the ability to influence others, have an impact on the decision-making processes of
society, and pursue and protect one’s self-interest and achieve one’s goals. One source of power is a person’s standing in politically active organizations, such as labor unions or pressure groups, which lobby state and federal legislatures. Some politically active groups have access to great wealth and can use their riches to promote their causes. Other groups may rely more on their size and their ability to mobilize large demonstrations to achieve their goals. Political groups and the people they represent vary in their ability to affect the political process and control decision making; that is, they vary in the amount of power they can mobilize.

Typically, these three dimensions of stratification go together: Wealthy, prestigious groups will be more powerful (more likely to achieve their goals or protect their self-interest) than low-income groups or groups with little prestige. It is important to realize, however, that the three dimensions are separate and that even groups that are impoverished or command little prestige have found ways to express their concerns and pursue their goals.

Gerhard Lenski. Gerhard Lenski is a contemporary sociologist who follows Weber and distinguishes between class (or property), prestige, and power. Lenski has expanded on Weber’s ideas, however, by analyzing stratification in the context of societal evolution or the level of development of a society. He has argued that the nature of inequality (the degree of inequality or the specific criteria affecting a group’s position) is closely related to subsistence technology, the means by which the society satisfies basic needs such as hunger and thirst. A preindustrial agricultural society relies on human and animal labor to generate the calories necessary to sustain life. Inequality in this type of society centers on control of land and labor because they are the most important means of production at that level of development.

In a modern industrial society, however, land ownership is not as crucial as ownership of manufacturing and commercial enterprises. At the industrial level of development, control of capital is more important than control of land, and the nature of inequality changes accordingly.

The United States has recently entered still another stage of development, often referred to as postindustrial society. In this type of society, economic growth is powered by developments in new technology, computer-related fields, information processing, and scientific research. It seems fairly safe to speculate that economic success at this next level of development will be closely related to familiarity with new technologies and education in general (Chirot, 1994, p. 88; see also Bell, 1973). Thus, as we shift to an information-based, high-tech, postindustrial society, the advantages conferred by higher levels of education will be magnified and groups that have less access to schooling will likely suffer an even greater handicap in the pursuit of resources, opportunities, and success.

Minority Group Status and Stratification

The theoretical perspectives we have just reviewed raise three important points about the connections between minority group status and stratification. First, as already noted, minority group status affects access to wealth and income, prestige, and power. A society in which minority groups systematically receive less of these valued goods is stratified, at least partly, by race and ethnicity. In the United States, minority group status has been and continues to be one of the most important and powerful determinants of life chances, health and wealth, and success. These patterns of inequality are documented and explored throughout this text, but even casual observation will reveal that minority groups control proportionately fewer resources and that minority group status and inequality are intimately and complexly intertwined.

Second, although social classes and minority groups are correlated, they are separate social realities. The degree to which one is dependent on the other varies from group to group and time to time. Also, each minority group is divided internally by systems of
inequality based on class, status, or power, and in the same way, members of the same social class may be separated by ethnic or racial differences. Thus, some minority group members can be economically successful, wield great political power, or enjoy high prestige even while the majority of their group languishes in poverty and powerlessness.

The third point concerning the connections between stratification and minority groups brings us to group conflict, a central concern of this text. You will see repeatedly that minority-dominant group relationships are created by struggle over the control of valued goods and services. The dominant group constructs minority group structures (such as slavery) in order to control commodities such as land or labor, maintain its position in the stratification system, or eliminate a perceived threat to its well-being. Struggles over property, wealth, prestige, and power lie at the heart of every dominant-minority relationship. Karl Marx believed that all aspects of society and culture were shaped to benefit the elite or ruling class and sustain the economic system that underlies its privileged position. The treatment of minority groups throughout American history provides a good deal of evidence to support Marx’s point.

Visibility

The second defining characteristic of a minority group is some visible trait or characteristic that sets members of the group apart and that the dominant group holds in low esteem. The trait can be cultural (language, religion, speech patterns, or dress styles), physical (skin color, stature, or facial features), or both. Groups that are defined primarily by their cultural characteristics are called ethnic minority groups. Examples of such groups are Irish Americans and Jewish Americans. Groups defined primarily by their physical characteristics are racial minority groups, such as African Americans and Native Americans. Note that these categories overlap. So-called ethnic groups may have (or may be thought to have) distinguishing physical characteristics (for example, the stereotypical Irish red hair or Jewish nose), and racial groups commonly have (or are thought to have) cultural traits that differ from those of the dominant group (for example, differences in dialect, religious values, or cuisine).

These distinguishing traits set social boundaries and separate people into distinct groups. The traits are outward signs that identify minority group members and help to maintain the patterns of disadvantage. The dominant group has (or, at one time, had) sufficient power to create the distinction between groups and thus solidify a higher position for itself. The highly visible markers of group membership are crucial. Without them, it would be difficult or impossible to identify who was in which group, and the system of minority group oppression would soon collapse.

It is important to realize that the characteristics that mark the boundaries between groups usually are not significant in and of themselves. They reflect the outcomes of previous struggles between dominant and minority groups and are selected for their visibility and convenience. They are chosen as a result of a social process, not because they are important in any other sense. This point can be illustrated with the concepts of race and gender, the most socially visible marks of group membership in U.S. society.

Race

Race became a matter of concern in Western European history in relatively recent times. In the 1500s, during the Age of Discovery, Europeans first came into continuous contact with the peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Americas and became more aware of and curious about the physical differences between people. Europeans also conquered, colonized, and sometimes destroyed the peoples and cultures they encountered. From the beginning, the European awareness of the differences between the races was linked to notions of inferior and superior (conquered vs. conquering) peoples. For centuries, the European tradition has been to see race in this political and military context and to
intermix biological realities with judgments about the relative merits of the various races. Because of its particular origins in Western European thought, the concept of race has come to have both a biological and a social dimension. Biologically, a race is an isolated, inbreeding population with a distinctive genetic heritage (Harris, 1988, p. 8). Biological investigations of race have focused on the construction of systems of classification that (ideally) would provide a category for every race and every person. Some of these typologies are quite elaborate and include scores of races and subraces. For example, the Caucasian race is often subdivided into Nordics (blond, fair-skinned Northern Europeans), Mediterraneans (dark-haired Southern Europeans), and Alpines (those falling between the first two categories).

The major limitation of these taxonomies is that even the most elaborate fail to identify clear dividing lines between racial groups, primarily because of the ambiguous and indeterminate nature of race. Most racial traits run gradually from one extreme to the other. There is no clear or definite point, for example, at which “black” skin color stops and “white” skin color begins. Furthermore, the genes that determine the so-called racial characteristics (for example, skin color or hair texture) can occur in every possible combination. Skin color, for example, can be blended with other characteristics in an infinite variety of ways. A given individual might have a skin color that is associated with one race, the hair texture of a second, the nasal shape of a third, and so forth. Many individuals fit into more than one racial category or none at all. This ambiguity makes it impossible to establish racial categories that are not arbitrary, and the attempt to do so has been almost completely abandoned in the sciences.

From a scientific point of view, that’s all there is to skin color: The most visible marker of minority group membership is a superficial and relatively unimportant biological trait. In the United States, race is more a social than a biological reality, and racial minority groups are creations of historical and social—not biological—processes (see Omi & Winant, 1986; Smedley, 1999). Who belongs to which racial group is largely a matter of social definition and tradition, not biology. Membership in ethnic minority groups is even more arbitrary and subjective than membership in racial groups because the former are distinguished by characteristics that are less visible (language, religion,
or customs) and more changeable than skin color.

**Gender**

You have already seen that minority groups can be divided internally by social class and other factors. An additional source of differentiation is gender. Like race, gender has both a biological and a social component and can be a highly visible and convenient way of judging and sorting people. From birth, the biological differences between the sexes form the basis for different *gender roles*, or societal expectations about proper behavior, attitudes, and personality traits. In virtually all societies, including those at the advanced industrial stage, adult work roles tend to be separated by gender, and boys and girls are socialized differently in preparation for these adult roles. In hunter-gatherer societies, for example, boys train for the role of hunter, whereas girls learn the skills necessary for successful harvesting of vegetables, fruit, and other foodstuffs. In industrial societies, girls tend to learn nurturing skills that will help them take primary responsibility for the well-being of family and community members, and boys learn aggressiveness, which is considered necessary for their expected roles as leaders, combatants, and providers in a highly competitive society.

The exact makeup of gender roles and relationships varies across time and from society to society, but gender and inequality usually have been closely related, and men typically claim more property, prestige, and power. The societies of Western Europe and the United States, like most, have a strong tradition of *patriarchy*, or male dominance, throughout the social structure. In a patriarchal society, men have more control over the economy and more access to leadership roles in religion, politics, and other institutions. In these societies, women possess many characteristics of a minority group (namely, a pattern of disadvantage based on group membership marked by a physical stigma). Thus, women could be, and in many ways should be, treated as a separate minority group.

In this book, however, rather than discussing women as a separate group, I will explore the divergent experiences of men and women within each minority group. This approach will permit us to analyze the ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, and class combine, overlap, and crosscut each other to form a “matrix of domination” (Hill-Collins, 1991, pp. 225–227). We will consider how the interests and experiences of females of different groups and classes coincide with and diverge from each other and from those of the men in their groups. For example, on some issues, African American females might have interests identical to white females and opposed to African American males. On other issues, the constellations of interests might be reversed. As you shall see, the experience of minority group membership varies by gender, and the way in which gender is experienced is not the same for every group.

History generally has been and is written from the standpoint of the “winners,” that is, those in power. The voices of minority groups generally have been repressed, ignored, forgotten, or trivialized. Much of the history of slavery in America, for instance, has been told from the viewpoint of the slave owners. Slaves were kept illiterate by law and had few mechanisms for recording their thoughts or experiences. A more balanced and accurate picture of slavery began to emerge only in the past few decades, when scholars began to dig beneath the written records and memoirs of the slave owners and reconstruct the experiences of African Americans from nonwritten materials such as oral traditions and the physical artifacts left by the slaves.

Similarly, our understanding of minority groups tends to be based on the experiences of the males of the group, and the experiences of the females are much less well-known and documented. If the voices of minority groups have been hushed, those of female minority group members have been virtually silenced. One of the important trends in contemporary scholarship is to adjust this skewed focus and systematically incorporate gender as a factor in the minority group experience (Espiritu, 1997; Zinn & Dill, 1994).
Other Minority Group Characteristics

A third characteristic of minority groups, in addition to inequality and visibility, is that they are *self-conscious social units*, aware of their differentiation from the dominant group and of their shared disabilities. This shared social status can provide the basis for strong intragroup bonds and a sense of solidarity, and it can lead to views of the world that are quite different from those of the dominant group and other minority groups. For example, public opinion polls frequently show vast differences between dominant and minority groups in their views of the seriousness and extent of discrimination in American society. One recent poll showed that twice as many blacks (65%) as whites (33%) agree that discrimination is the reason black Americans have “worse jobs, incomes, and housing than white people” (National Opinion Research Council [NORC], 2000 General Social Survey [GSS]). Also, a Gallup poll showed that more than twice as many whites (75%) as blacks (32%) believe that blacks and whites are treated the same way in their local communities (Gallup Organization, 2000). Similar disagreements surface constantly over national policy issues ranging from affirmative action to welfare reform (for an analysis of these differences, see Kinder & Winter, 2001).

These disparities between blacks and whites are particularly common when issues related to criminal justice and policing arise. Surveys show sizable differences between the groups in their perceptions of the fairness of the police and the court system, differences that have been reinforced by highly publicized instances of police violence against blacks such as the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, and the murder of Amadou Diallo in New York City (Bobo, 2001, p. 281). A number of other criminal justice issues divide the communities, including racial profiling, “driving while black,” and support for capital punishment. These differences were dramatically revealed by the reactions of the two groups to the acquittal of former football star and celebrity O. J. Simpson on charges of murdering his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ron Goldman. One survey showed that 85% of black Americans but only 32% of white Americans agreed with the jury’s decision to acquit (Whitaker, 1995, pp. 30–34). Evidence such as this underscores the differing perceptions of the groups that constitute U.S. society and the conflicting interests and traditions that separate their realities.

A fourth characteristic of minority groups is that, in general, membership is an *ascribed status*, one that is acquired at birth. The trait that identifies minority group membership typically cannot be changed easily or at all, and minority group status usually is involuntary and for life.

Finally, minority group members tend to marry within their own groups. This pattern can be the result of voluntary choices made by members of the minority group, policies and customs enforced by the dominant group, or some combination of these forces. In fact, only a generation ago in America, interracial marriages were against the law in many states. The state laws against *miscegenation* were declared unconstitutional in the late 1960s by the U.S. Supreme Court (Bell, 1992).

Which Groups Are Minority Groups?

Our five-part definition is lengthy, but note how inclusive it is. Although it encompasses “traditional” minority groups such as African Americans and Native Americans, it also could be applied to other groups (with perhaps a little stretching). For instance, women arguably fit the first four criteria and can be analyzed with many of the same concepts and ideas that guide the analysis of other minority groups. Also, gay and lesbian Americans; Americans with disabilities; the left-handed; the aged; and very short, very tall, or very obese people could fit the definition of minority group without much difficulty. Although we shouldn’t be whimsical or capricious about matters of definition, it is important to note that the analysis developed in this book can be applied more generally than you might realize at first and may lead to some fresh insights about a wide variety of groups and people.
FOCUS ON GENDER

THE BIOLOGICAL BASIS OF RACE AND GENDER

The huge majority of social scientists regard race as a triviality, a social construction formulated in certain historical circumstances (like the era of European colonialism) when it was needed to help justify the unequal treatment of minority groups. What about gender? Is it also a social creation designed by men to rationalize their higher status? Or do the commonly observed gender differences (e.g., men are more aggressive, women more nurturing) have a biological basis stronger and more controlling than that supposedly associated with race? Are men and women different because of nature (differences in biology and genetic inheritance) or because of nurture (differences in expectations and experience for boys and girls during childhood socialization)?

Needless to say, responses to these questions vary both in the scientific community and in society at large. On one hand, some people (including most sociologists) argue that gender roles are overwhelmingly learned and that the commonly observed gender differences in adults are the results of the fact that society puts boys and girls on different tracks of development from the moment of birth. Evidence for this point of view includes the malleable, open-ended nature of infants and the great range of behavioral and personality repertoires within each gender (e.g., some females are more aggressive than some males, and some males are more tender and nurturing than some females). Also, according to this view, the fact that “appropriate” behaviors for males and females vary from culture to culture and from time to time and are not fixed and permanent is taken as proof that there is no biological basis for gender roles.

On the other hand, some believe that the behavioral differences between males and females are “hardwired” in our genetic code just as surely and permanently as the differences in reproductive organs. Sociologist Steven Goldberg (1999), for example, argued that some gender characteristics are universal. He observed that males are more aggressive and that they control leadership positions and power structures in every society about which we have information. Goldberg believes that this is so because men are predisposed to pursue status and dominance over other pleasures and rewards of life—safety, wealth, leisure, and so forth—and that this tendency is the result of biology and genetic inheritance, not socialization or learning (1999, p. 54).

Still other scientists are pursuing a third approach that combines nature and nurture. In this view, genetic inheritance and socialization experiences work together in a variety of ways, some exquisitely subtle, to produce the commonly observed gender differences in adults. For example, sociologist Richard Udry (2000) reported the results of an investigation into the combined effects of biology and experience on the adult personalities of a sample of 351 women. He argued that one root of adult gender differences may lie in the biology of sex, specifically, the extent to which fetuses are exposed to the male hormone testosterone. Of course, male fetuses are exposed to much higher levels than females, and this prebirth experience, in Udry’s view, is what makes males more responsive to postbirth learning experiences that stress aggression and toughness. Thus, the biology of sex may predispose or sensitize males and females in very different ways and prepare them for differential socialization experiences.

Udry’s research goes beyond this general difference between the sexes and asks...
KEY CONCEPTS
IN DOMINANT-MINORITY RELATIONS

To fully understand dominant-minority relations, we need to take account of two distinct levels of analysis and distinguish between two dimensions on each level. We need to distinguish between what is true for individuals (the psychological level of analysis) and what is true for groups or society as a whole (the sociological level of analysis). We also need to make a further distinction on both the individual and the group levels. At the individual level, there can be a difference between what people think and feel about other groups and how they actually behave toward members of that group. A person might express negative feelings about other groups in private but deal fairly with members of the group in face-to-face interactions. Groups and entire societies may display this same kind of inconsistency. A society may express support for equality in its official documents or formal codes of law, while simultaneously treating minority groups in unfair and destructive ways. An example of this kind of inconsistency is the

if women who had been exposed to different levels of testosterone in the womb have different personality characteristics as adults. He found that the women in the study who had higher levels of prenatal exposure to testosterone were more “masculine” in their behavior as adults and that this pattern persisted even for the women whose mothers had strongly encouraged them to become more feminine when they were children (Udry, 2000, p. 450). These and similar results led Udry to conclude that prenatal and postnatal experiences interact in complex ways to produce the differences that are seen as “typical” of men and women. Nature or biology seems to set limits and establish tendencies, but these potentials are then emphasized or minimized by nurture or experience, and it is the interaction between the two forces that produces the wide variation in, for example, aggressive or nurturing behaviors within the genders. Udry noted that these findings, if they are verified in future research, do not invalidate or refute explanations of gender differences that stress socialization or nurture. They do, however, require recognition that biology sets some (very broad?) limits on the effects of gender socialization.

If Udry (2000) and (especially) Goldberg (1999) are correct, then gender is not an arbitrary social construct, at least not in the same way as race. However, it is important to recognize that this debate about the possible biological bases for gender roles is far from over. The research is limited in many ways, and the evidence is open to a variety of interpretations. For example, Udry’s sample was selected from a group of patients who happened to use a particular health care facility, and his results cannot be generalized to larger or more diverse populations. Furthermore, scientific objectivity is often an issue when researching questions that can be so emotionally charged. Prejudicial sentiments and the pervasive sexism of the surrounding society can tinge and color even the most carefully crafted research project.

Where does that leave us? Can the view that adult gender roles are entirely learned be sustained? Must social scientists at least admit the possibility of biological influences? How powerful are the genetic tendencies that may underlie gender role differences? Although these issues are not fully resolved, it seems that the strongest role that biology could play is to shape and predispose males and females to follow different patterns in their development. Gender, like race, becomes a social construction when it is treated as an unchanging, fixed difference and then used to deny opportunity and equality to women.
contrast between the commitment to equality stated in the Declaration of Independence ("All men are created equal") and the actual treatment of black slaves, Anglo-American women, and Native Americans at the time the document was written.

At the individual level, social scientists refer to the “thinking/feeling” part of this dichotomy as prejudice and the “doing” part as discrimination. At the group level, the term ideological racism describes the “thinking/feeling” dimension and institutional discrimination describes the “doing” dimension. Exhibit 1.2 presents the differences among these four concepts. In the sections of the chapter below, we will devote most of our attention to the individual-level concepts, but in the chapters that follow, we emphasize the sociological level of analysis.

**Exhibit 1.2 Four Concepts in Dominant-Minority Relations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Group or Societal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking/feeling</td>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>Ideological racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing</td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>Institutional discrimi nation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prejudice

Prejudice is the tendency of an individual to think about other groups in negative ways, to attach negative emotions to those groups, and to prejudge individuals on the basis of their group membership. Individual prejudice has two aspects: the cognitive, or thinking, aspect and the affective, or feeling, part. A prejudiced person thinks about other groups in terms of stereotypes, generalizations that are thought to apply to all group members. Examples of familiar stereotypes include notions such as “women are emotional,” “Jews are stingy,” “blacks are lazy,” “the Irish are drunks,” and “Germans are authoritarian.” A prejudiced person also experiences negative emotional responses to other groups, including contempt, disgust, arrogance, and hatred. People vary in their levels of prejudice, and levels of prejudice vary in the same person from one time to another and from one group to another. We can say that a person is prejudiced to the extent that he or she uses stereotypes in his or her thinking about other groups and/or has negative emotional reactions to other groups.

Generally, the two dimensions of prejudice are highly correlated with each other; however, they are distinct and separate, and they can vary independently. One person may think entirely in stereotypes but feel no particular negative emotional response to any group. Another person may feel a very strong aversion toward a group but be unable to articulate a clear or detailed stereotype of that group.

**Causes of Prejudice**

American social scientists of all disciplines have made prejudice a primary concern and have produced literally thousands of articles and books on the topic. They have approached the subject from a variety of theoretical perspectives and have asked a wide array of different questions. One firm conclusion that has emerged is that prejudice is not a single, unitary phenomenon. It has a variety of possible causes (some more psychological and individual, others more sociological and cultural) and can present itself in a variety of forms (some blatant and vicious, others subtle and indirect). No single theory has emerged that can explain prejudice in all its complexity. In keeping with the macro sociological approach of this text, we will focus primarily on the theories that stress the causes of prejudice that are related to culture, social structure, and group relationships.
The study of minority groups in the U.S.

Competition Between Groups and the Origins of Prejudice. Every form of prejudice—even the most ancient—started at some specific point in history. If we go back far enough in time, we can find a moment that predates anti-black prejudice, anti-Semitism, negative stereotypes about Native Americans or Hispanic Americans, or antipathy against Asian Americans. What sorts of conditions create prejudice?

The one common factor that seems to account for the origin of any specific prejudice is competition between groups: some episode in which one group successfully dominates, takes resources from, or eliminates a threat from some other group. The successful group becomes the dominant group, and the other group becomes the minority group. Why is group competition associated with the emergence of prejudice? Typically, prejudice is more a result of the competition than a cause. Its role is to help mobilize emotional energy for the contest, justify rejection and attack, and rationalize the structures of domination, like slavery or segregation, that result from the competition. Groups react to the competition and to the threat presented by the other group with antipathy and stereotypes about the “enemy” group: Prejudice emerges from the heat of the contest.

The relationship between prejudice and competition has been demonstrated in a variety of settings and situations ranging from labor strikes to international war to social psychology labs. In the chapters to come, we will examine the role of prejudice during the creation of slavery in North America, as a reaction to periods of high immigration, and as an accompaniment to myriad forms of group competition. Here, to illustrate our central point about competition and prejudice, we will examine a classic experiment from the sociological literature. The experiment was conducted in the 1950s at a summer camp for 11- and 12-year-old boys known as Robber’s Cave.

The camp director, social psychologist Muzafer Sherif, divided the campers into two groups, the Rattlers and the Eagles (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). The groups lived in different cabins and were continually pitted against each other in a wide range of activities. Games, sports, and even housekeeping chores were set up on a competitive basis. The boys in each group began to express negative feelings (prejudice) against the other group. Competition and prejudicial feelings grew quite intense and were manifested in episodes of name-calling and raids on the “enemy” group.

Sherif attempted to reduce the harsh feelings he had created by bringing the campers together in various pleasant situations featuring food, movies, and other treats. But the rival groups only used these opportunities to express their enmity. Sherif then came up with some activities that required the members of the rival groups to work cooperatively with each other. For example, the researchers deliberately sabotaged some plumbing to create an emergency that required the efforts of everyone to resolve. As a result of these cooperative activities, intergroup “prejudice” was observed to decline, and, eventually, friendships were formed across groups.

In the Robber’s Cave experiment, as in many actual group relationships, prejudice (negative feelings and stereotypes about other campers) arose to help mobilize feelings and to justify rejection and attacks, both verbal and physical, against the out-group. When group competition was reduced, the levels of prejudice abated and eventually disappeared, again demonstrating that prejudice is caused by competition, not the other way around.

Although the Robber’s Cave experiment illustrates our central point, we must be cautious in generalizing from these results. The experiment was conducted in an artificial environment with young boys (all white) who had no previous acquaintance with each other and no history of grievances or animosity. Thus, these results may be only partially generalizable to group conflicts in the “real world.” Nonetheless, Robber’s Cave illustrates a fundamental connection between group competition and prejudice that we will observe repeatedly in the chapters to come. Competition and the desire to protect resources and status and to defend against
threats from other groups are the primary motivations for the construction of traditions of prejudice and structures of inequality that benefit the dominant group.

Culture, Socialization, and the Persistence of Prejudice. Prejudice originates in group competition of some sort but often outlives the conditions of its creation. It can persist, full-blown and intense, long after the episode that sparked its creation has faded from memory. How does prejudice persist through time?

In his classic analysis of American race relations, An American Dilemma (1944/1962), Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal proposed the idea that prejudice is perpetuated through time by a self-fulfilling prophecy or a vicious cycle, as illustrated in Exhibit 1.3. The dominant group uses its power to force the minority group into an inferior status, such as slavery, as shown in area (1). Partly to motivate the construction of a system of racial stratification and partly to justify its existence, individual prejudice and racist belief systems are invented and accepted by the dominant group, as shown in area (2). Individual prejudices are reinforced by the everyday observation of the inferior status of the minority group. The fact that the minority group is in fact impoverished, enslaved, or otherwise exploited confirms and strengthens the attribution of inferiority. The belief in inferiority motivates further discrimination and unequal treatment, as shown in area (3) of the diagram, which reinforces the inferior status, which validates the prejudice and racism, which justifies further discrimination, and so on. Over not too many generations, a stable, internally reinforced system of racial inferiority becomes an integral, unremarkable, and (at least for the dominant group) accepted part of everyday life.

Culture is conservative, and, once created, prejudice will be sustained over time just like any set of attitudes, values, and beliefs. We learn which groups are “good” and which are “bad” in the same way we learn table manners and religious beliefs (Pettigrew, 1958, 1971, p. 137; Simpson & Yinger, 1985, pp. 107, 108). When prejudice is part of the cultural heritage, individuals learn to think and feel negatively toward other groups as a routine part of socialization. Much of the prejudice expressed by Americans—and the people of many other societies—is the normal result of a typical socialization in families, communities, and societies that are, to some degree, racist. Given our long history of intense racial and ethnic exploitation, it is not surprising that Americans continue to manifest antipathy toward and stereotypical ideas about other groups.

The idea that prejudice is learned during socialization is reinforced by studies of the development of prejudice in children. Research shows that people are born without bias and have to be taught whom to like and dislike. Children become aware of group differences (e.g., black vs. white) at a very early age. By age 3 or younger, they recognize the significance and the permanence of racial groups and can accurately classify people on the basis of skin color and other cues (Brown, 1995, pp. 121–136; Katz, 1976, p. 126). Once the racial or group categories are mentally established, the child begins the process of learning the “proper” attitudes and stereotypes to associate with the various groups, and both affective and cognitive prejudice begin to grow at an early age.

It is important to note that children can acquire prejudice even when parents and other caregivers do not teach it overtly or directly. Adults control the socialization process and valuable resources (food, shelter, praise), and children are motivated to seek their approval and conform to their expectations (at least in the early years). There are strong pressures on the child to learn and internalize the perceptions of the older generation, and even a casual comment or an overheard remark can establish or reinforce negative beliefs or feelings about members of other groups (Ashmore & DelBoca, 1976).
Children need not be directly instructed about presumed minority group characteristics; it is often said that racial attitudes are “caught and not taught.”

A somewhat different line of research on the development of prejudice argues that children are actively engaged in their learning and that their levels of prejudice reflect their changing intellectual capabilities. Children as young as 5 to 6 months old can make some simple distinctions (e.g., by gender or race) between categories of people. The fact that this capability emerges so early in life suggests that it is not simply a response to adult teaching. “Adults use categories to simplify and make sense of their environment; apparently children do the same” (Brown, 1995, p. 126). Gross, simplistic distinctions between people may help very young children organize and understand the world around them. The need for such primitive categorizations may decline as the child becomes more experienced in life and more sophisticated in his or her thinking. Doyle and Aboud (1995), for example, found that prejudice was highest for younger children and actually decreased between kindergarten and the third grade. The decline was related to increased awareness of racial similarities (as well as differences) and diverse perspectives on race (see also Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Brown, 1995, pp. 149–159; Powlisha, Serbin, Doyle, & White, 1994). Thus, changing levels of prejudice in children may reflect an interaction between the child’s changing mental capacities and their environment rather than a simple or straightforward learning of racist cultural beliefs or values.

Further evidence for the cultural nature of prejudice is provided by research on the concept of social distance. Social distance is related to prejudice but is not quite the same thing. Social distance is defined as the degree of intimacy which a person is willing to accept in his or her relations with members of other groups. The most intimate relationship would be close kinship, and the most distant relationship is exclusion from the country. The inventor of the social distance scale was Emory Bogardus (1933), who specified a total of seven degrees of social distance:

1. To close kinship by marriage
2. To my club as personal chums
3. To my street as neighbors
4. To employment in my occupation
5. To citizenship in my country
6. As visitors only to my country
7. Would exclude from my country

Research using social distance scales demonstrates that Americans rank other groups in similar ways across time and space. The consistency indicates a common frame of reference or set of perceptions, a continuity of vision possible only if perceptions have been standardized by socialization in a common culture.

Exhibit 1.4 presents some results of six administrations of the scale to samples of Americans from 1926 to 1993. The groups are listed by the rank order of their scores for 1926. The average scores for 1926 show that the sample expressed the least social distance against the English, the average score of 1.06 indicating virtually no sense of distance. The
### Exhibit 1.4 Results of American Social Distance Rankings of Other Groups, 1926–1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>1926 Score</th>
<th>1946 Score</th>
<th>1956 Score</th>
<th>1966 Score</th>
<th>1977 Score</th>
<th>1993 Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>Am. whites</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>Am. whites</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Am. whites</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>Canadians</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>Canadians</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Canadians</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Scots</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>Scots</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>Norwegians</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>Scots</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Norwegians</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>Norwegians</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>Czechs</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>Italians</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Italians</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Poles</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>Greeks</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Armenians</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>Italians</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Czechs</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>Armenians</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>Czechs</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Native Am.</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>Greeks</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>Armenians</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>Japanese Am.</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Greeks</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>Native Am.</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>Native Am.</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Mexicans</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>Filipinos</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>Mexican Am.</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>Mexican Am.</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Filipinos</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>Turks</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>African Am.</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>Mexicans</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Turks</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>Turks</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>Japanese Am.</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Koreans</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>Koreans</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>African Am.</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>Mexicans</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>African Am.</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>African Am.</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>Koreans</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>Koreans</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mean:** 2.14  2.12  2.08  1.92  1.93  1.43  1.07

**Range:** 2.85  2.57  1.75  1.56  1.38  1.07


**NOTE:** Am. whites = American whites, African Am. = African Americans (the term “Negroes” was used in the earlier studies), Japanese Am. = Japanese Americans, Mexican Am. = Mexican Americans, Native Am. = Native Americans (the term “Indians-American” was used before 1993).
greatest distance was expressed against Indians (from Asia), with a score of 3.91. On average, the sample would admit this group only to “employment in my occupation” and not to “my street as neighbors.”

Note, first of all, the stability in the rankings. The scores generally decrease from decade to decade, indicating less social distance and presumably a decline in prejudice over the years. The rankings of the various groups, however, were roughly the same in 1993 as they were in 1926. If you pick a few groups and trace their positions across the decades, you will note that although some groups rise and fall over the nearly 70-year period, the overall ranking in the latest year is highly correlated with that in the earliest year. Considering the changes the society experienced between 1926 and 1993 (the Great Depression, World War II and the Korean War, the Cold War with the U.S.S.R., the Civil Rights movement, the resumption of large-scale immigration, etc.), this overall continuity in group rankings is remarkable.

Second, note the nature of the ranking: Groups with origins in Northern and Western Europe are ranked highest, followed by groups from Southern and Eastern Europe, with racial minorities near the bottom. These preferences reflect the relative status of these groups in the U.S. hierarchy of racial/ethnic groups. The rankings also reflect the relative amount of exploitation and prejudice directed at each group over the course of U.S. history.

Finally, note how the relative positions of some groups change with international and domestic relations. For example, both Japanese and Germans fell in the rankings after the end of World War II (1946). Comparing 1966 with 1946, Russians fell and the Japanese rose, reflecting changing patterns of alliance and enmity in the global system of societies. The dramatic rise of Native Americans and African Americans from 1966 to 1977 may reflect declining levels of overt prejudice in American society.

Although these patterns of social distance scores support the general point that prejudice is cultural, this body of research has some important limitations. The respondents generally were college students from a variety of campuses, not representative samples of the population, and the differences in scores from group to group sometimes were very small. Still, the stability of the patterns cannot be ignored: The top two or three groups are always Northern European, Poles and Jews are always ranked in the middle third of the groups, and Chinese and Japanese always fall in the bottom third. African Americans and Native Americans were also ranked toward the bottom until the most recent rankings.

The stability in the group rankings over the seven decades from the 1920s to the 1990s strongly suggests that Americans view the various groups through the same culturally shaped lens. A sense of social distance, a perception of some groups as “higher” or “better” than others, is part of the cultural package of intergroup prejudices we acquire from socialization into American society. The social distance patterns illustrate the power of culture to shape individual perceptions and preferences and attest to the fundamentally racist nature of American culture.

**The Sociology of Prejudice**

The sociological approach to prejudice stresses several points. Prejudice has its origins in competition between groups, and it is more a result of that competition than a cause. It is created at a certain time in history to help mobilize feelings and emotional energy for competition and to rationalize the consignment of a group to minority status. It then becomes a part of the cultural heritage and is passed on to later generations as part of their “taken for granted” world, where it helps to shape their perceptions and reinforce the very group inferiority that was its original cause.

**Discrimination**

At the individual level, discrimination is defined as the unequal treatment of a person or persons based on group membership. An example of discrimination is when an employer decides not to hire an individual because he or
she is African American (or Puerto Rican, Jewish, Chinese, and so on). If the unequal treatment is based on the group membership of the individual, the act is discrimination.

One obvious and common cause of discrimination is prejudice. However, just as the cognitive and affective aspects of prejudice can be independent, discrimination and prejudice do not necessarily occur together. For example, the social situation surrounding the individual may encourage or discourage discrimination, regardless of the level of prejudice. Social situations in which prejudice is strongly approved and supported might evoke discrimination in otherwise unprejudiced individuals. In the southern United States during the height of segregation, or in South Africa during the period of state-sanctioned racial inequality, it was usual and customary for whites to treat blacks in discriminatory ways. Regardless of their actual level of prejudice, white people in these situations faced strong social pressure to conform to the commonly accepted patterns of racial superiority and participate in acts of discrimination.

On the other hand, situations in which there are strong norms of equal and fair treatment may stifle the tendency of even the most bigoted individual to discriminate. For example, if a community vigorously enforces antidiscrimination laws, even the most prejudiced merchant might refrain from treating minority group customers unequally. Highly prejudiced individuals may not discriminate so that they can “do business” (or, at least, avoid penalties or sanctions) in an environment in which discrimination is not tolerated or is too costly. Also, people normally subscribe to many different value systems, some of which may be mutually contradictory. Even people who are devout racists may also believe in and be guided by democratic, egalitarian values.

One of the earliest demonstrations of the difference between what people think and feel (prejudice) and what they actually do (discrimination) was provided by sociologist Robert LaPiere (1934). In the 1930s, he escorted a Chinese couple on a tour of the United States. At that time, Chinese and other Asians were the victims of widespread discrimination and exclusion, and anti-Chinese prejudice was quite high, as demonstrated by the scores in Exhibit 1.4. However, LaPiere and his companions dined in restaurants and stayed in hotels without incident for the entire trip and experienced discrimination only once. Six months later, LaPiere wrote to every establishment the group had patronized and inquired about reservations. He indicated that some of the party were Chinese and asked if that would be a problem. Of those establishments that replied (about half), 92% said that they would not serve Chinese and would be unable to accommodate the party.

Why the difference? On LaPiere’s original visit, anti-Asian prejudice may well have been present but was not expressed to avoid making a scene. In a different situation—the more distant interaction of letters and correspondence—the restaurant and hotel staff may have allowed their prejudice to be expressed in open discrimination because the potential for embarrassment was much less.

To summarize, discrimination and prejudice tend to be found together, but they are not the same thing. Discrimination can be motivated by negative feelings and stereotypes, but it also can be a response to social pressures exerted by others.

Ideological Racism

The group or societal equivalent of individual prejudice is ideological racism, a belief system that asserts that a particular group is inferior. As I pointed out earlier, this form of prejudice is incorporated into a society’s culture and passed on to individuals from generation to generation. However, as opposed to individual prejudice, ideological racism is a part of the cultural heritage and exists apart from the people who inhabit a society at a specific time (Andersen, 1993, p. 75; See & Wilson, 1988, p. 227). An example of ideological racism was the elaborate system of beliefs and ideas that attempted to justify slavery in the American South. The exploitation of slaves was “explained” in terms of the innate racial
inferiority of blacks, and this cluster of beliefs was absorbed by each new generation of Southern whites during socialization.

This book analyzes ethnic as well as racial minority groups, but there is no widely used or convenient term for ideologies that attribute inferiority to groups based on cultural factors. Thus, we will take some liberties and use the term ideological racism to refer to belief systems focused on these nonracial traits—some forms of anti-Semitism, for example. The term ideological sexism—analogous to ideological racism but focused on gender differences—will be used when we analyze patterns of inequality between males and females.

I have already pointed out that people socialized into societies with strong racist ideologies will very likely absorb racist ideas and be highly prejudiced. At the same time, we need to remember that ideological racism and individual prejudice are different things with different causes and different locations in the society. Racism is not a prerequisite for prejudice; prejudice may exist even in the absence of an ideology of racism.

**Institutional Discrimination**

Our final concept, and a major concern in the chapters to come, is the societal equivalent of individual discrimination. *Institutional discrimination* refers to a pattern of unequal treatment based on group membership, a pattern built into the daily operations of society, whether or not it is consciously intended. This form of inequality can permeate public schools, the criminal justice system, and the political and economic institutions of a society. When these institutions and organizations operate so as to routinely put members of some groups at a disadvantage, institutional discrimination is present.

Institutional discrimination can be obvious and overt. For many years following the Civil War, African Americans in the South were prevented from voting by practices such as poll taxes and rigged literacy tests. For nearly a century, well into the 1960s, elections and elected offices in the South were limited to whites only. The purpose of this blatant pattern of institutional discrimination was widely understood by black and white Southerners alike: It existed to disenfranchise the black community and keep it politically powerless.

At other times, institutional discrimination may operate more subtly and without conscious intent. If public schools use aptitude tests that are biased in favor of the dominant group, decisions about who does and who does not take college preparatory courses may be made on racist grounds, even if everyone involved sincerely believes that they are merely applying objective criteria in a rational way. Whenever a decision-making process has unequal consequences for dominant and minority groups, institutional discrimination may be at work.

Note that although a particular discriminatory policy may be implemented and enforced by individuals, the policy is more appropriately thought of as an aspect of the operation of the institution as a whole. Election officials in the South during segregation did not have to be personally prejudiced themselves to implement these discriminatory policies, nor do public school administrators today.

A major thesis of this book is that the relative advantage of the dominant group is maintained from day to day by widespread institutional discrimination and ideological racism. Members of the dominant group who are socialized into communities with strong racist ideologies and a great deal of institutional discrimination are likely to be personally prejudiced and to routinely practice acts of individual discrimination. The respective positions of dominant and minority groups are preserved over time through the mutually reinforcing patterns of prejudice, racism, and discrimination on both individual and institutional levels.
MAIN POINTS

• The United States faces enormous problems with minority-dominant relationships. Even while many historic grievances of minority groups remain unresolved, society is rapidly becoming more diverse, culturally, linguistically, and racially.

• A minority group has five defining characteristics: a pattern of disadvantage, identification by some visible mark, awareness of its disadvantaged status, a membership determined at birth, and a tendency to marry within the group.

• A stratification system has three different dimensions (class, prestige, and power), and the nature of inequality in a society varies by its level of development. Minority groups and social class are correlated in numerous and complex ways.

• Race is a criterion widely used to identify minority group members. As a biological concept, race has been largely abandoned, but as a social category, race maintains a powerful influence on the way we think about one another.

• Minority groups are differentiated internally by social class, age, region of residence, and many other variables. In this book, I focus on gender as a source of variation within minority groups.

• Four crucial concepts for analyzing dominant-minority relations are prejudice, discrimination, ideological racism, and institutional discrimination.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND STUDY

1. What kind of society should the United States strive to become? In your view, does the increasing diversity of American society represent a threat or an opportunity? Should we acknowledge and celebrate our differences, or should we strive for more unity and conformity? What possible dangers and opportunities are inherent in increasing diversity?

2. What groups should be considered “minorities?” Using each of the five criteria included in the definition presented in this chapter, should gays and lesbians be considered a minority group? How about left-handed people or people who are very overweight?

3. What is a social construction? How do race and gender differ in this regard? What does it mean to say “Gender becomes a social construction—like race—when it is treated as an unchanging, fixed difference and then used to deny opportunity and equality to women?”

4. Define and explain each of the terms in Exhibit 1.2. Cite an example of each from your own experiences.

5. From a sociological point of view, what causes prejudice? What is the relationship between prejudice and competition? How is prejudice sustained through time? How does prejudice differ from discrimination?


INTERNET RESEARCH PROJECT

A. Updating Data on Diversity

Update Exhibit 1.1, “Groups in American Society.” Visit the Web site of the U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov) to get the latest estimates of the sizes of minority groups in the United States. Good places to begin the search for data include “Minority Links,” “Statistical Abstract,” and the list at “Subjects A to Z.”
B. How Does the U.S. Government Define Race?

In this chapter, I stressed the point that race is at least as much a social construction as a biological reality. Does the federal government see race as a biological reality or a social convention? Search the Census Bureau Web site for information on the government’s definition of race. How was a person’s race defined in the 2000 Census? How does this differ from previous censuses? Who determines a person’s race, the government or the person filling out the census form? Is this treatment of race based on a biological approach or a more arbitrary social perspective? Given the goals of the Census (e.g., to accurately count the number and types of people in the U.S. population), is this a reasonable approach to classifying race? Why or why not?

C. Test Your Individual Level of Racial Prejudice

Go to the site https://buster.cs.yale.edu/implicit/. Click on “Demonstration” and take the Race Implicit Attitudes Test. Be sure to explore the site and learn more about the test before signing off. What type of prejudice (personality-based, culture-based, or prejudice that results from group competition) does the IAT measure? Do you feel that the test produced valid results in your case?

FOR FURTHER READING


The classic work on individual prejudice.

A passionate analysis of the pervasiveness of racism and anti-black prejudice in America.

An adept analysis of the social and political uses of race.

An analysis of the origins of the American view of race.

A highly readable look at minority groups and cultural diversity in American life.

A wide-ranging collection of articles examining the intersecting forces of race, class, and gender in the United States.