14.2: The Beginning of Bias

People are often very skilled at person perception—the process of learning about other people—and our brains are designed to help us judge others. Infants prefer to look at faces of people more than they do other visual patterns, and...
children quickly learn to identify people and their emotional expressions. As adults, we are able to identify and remember a potentially unlimited number of people as we navigate our social, and we form impressions of those others quickly and without much effort. Furthermore, our first impressions are, at least in some cases, remarkably accurate.

Learning about people is a lot like learning about any other object in our environment, with one major exception. With an object, there is no interaction: we learn about the characteristics of a car or a cell phone, for example, without any concern that the car or the phone is learning about us. It is a one-way process. With people, in contrast, there is a two-way social process: just as we are learning about another person, that person is learning about us, or potentially attempting to keep us from accurately perceiving him or her. For instance, research has found that when other people are looking directly at us, we process their features more fully and faster, and we remember them better than when the same people are not looking at us.

In the social dynamic with others, then, we have two goals: first, we need to learn about them, and second, we want them to learn about us (and, we hope, like and respect us). Our focus here is on the former process—how we make sense of other people. But remember that just as you are judging them, they are judging you.

We have seen that when people are asked to describe themselves, they generally do so in terms of their physical features (“I am really tall”), social category memberships (“I am a woman”), and traits (“I am friendly”). These characteristics well reflect the dimensions we use when we try to form impressions of others. [208]

We can also use nonverbal communication to interpret different scenarios, which in turn helps shape ourselves, both consciously and unconsciously.

Nonverbal Behavior

Nonverbal behavior is any type of communication that does not involve speaking, including facial expressions, body language, touching, voice patterns, and interpersonal distance. Nonverbal behaviors are used to reinforce spoken words (Hostetter, 2011) but also include such things as interpersonal distance (how far away from you the other person stands), tone of voice, eye gaze, and hand gestures and body positions (DePaulo et al., 2003). Nonverbal behavior affects how people interpret different scenarios, both consciously

The ability to decode nonverbal behavior is learned early, even before the development of language (Walker-Andrews, 2008). We tend to like people who have a pleasant tone of voice and open posture, who stand an appropriate distance away from us, and who look at and touch us for the “right” amount of time—not too much or too little. And, of course, behavior matters; people who walk faster are perceived as happier and more powerful than those who walk more slowly (Montepare & Zebrowitz-McArthur, 1988).

Although they may be pretty good at it in some cases, people are often not aware of their ability to make accurate judgments. Rule, Ambady, Adams, and Macrae (2008) found that even though the participants in their research were quite accurate in their perceptions, they could not articulate how they made their judgments. They claimed that they were “just guessing” and could hardly believe that they were getting the judgments right. These results suggest that they were made without any conscious awareness on the part of the judges. Furthermore, the participants’ judgments of their own accuracy were not generally correlated with their actual accurate judgments.
The particular nonverbal behaviors that we use, as well as their meanings, are determined by social norms, and these norms may vary across cultures. For example, people who live in warm climates nearer the equator use more nonverbal communication (e.g., talking with their hands or showing strong facial expressions) and are more likely to touch each other during conversations than people who live in colder climates nearer Earth’s poles (Manstead, 1991; Pennebaker, Rime, & Blankenship, 1996). And the appropriate amount of personal space to keep between ourselves and others also varies across cultures. In some cultures—for instance, those of South American countries—it is appropriate to stand very close to another person while talking to him or her; in other cultures—for example, in the United States and Western Europe—more interpersonal space is the norm (Knapp & Hall, 2006). The appropriate amount of eye contact with others is also determined by culture. In some parts of Latin America, it is appropriate to lock eyes with another person, whereas in Japan, people more often try to avoid eye contact.

Social Categorization

Thinking about others in terms of their group memberships is known as social categorization—the natural cognitive process by which we place individuals into social groups. Social categorization occurs when we think of someone as a man (versus a woman), an old person (versus a young person), a Black person (versus an Asian or white person), and so on (Allport, 1954/1979). Just as we categorize objects into different types, so do we categorize people according to their social group memberships. Once we do so, we begin to respond to those people more as members of a social group than as individuals.

Here is an example in which we see both social categorization and stereotyping in an adult setting:

Imagine for a moment that two college students, Farhad and Sarah, are talking at a table in the student union at your college or university. At this point, we would probably not consider them to be acting as group members, but rather as two individuals. Farhad is expressing his opinions, and Sarah is expressing hers. Imagine, however, that as the conversation continues, Sarah brings up an assignment that she is completing for her women’s studies class. It turns out that Farhad does not think there should be a women’s studies program at the college, and he tells Sarah so. He argues that if there is a women’s studies program, then there should be a men’s studies program too. Furthermore, he argues that women are getting too many breaks in job hiring and that qualified men are the targets of discrimination. Sarah feels quite the contrary—arguing that women have been the targets of sexism for many, many years and even now do not have the same access to high-paying jobs that men do.
You can see that an interaction that began at individual level, as two individuals conversing, has now turned to the group level, in which Farhad has begun to consider himself as a man, and Sarah has begun to consider herself as a woman. In short, Sarah is now arguing her points not so much for herself as she is as a representative of one of her ingroups—namely, women—and Farhad is acting as a representative of one of his ingroups—namely, men. Sarah feels that her positions are correct, and she believes they are true not only for her but for women in general. And the same is true of Farhad. You can see that these social categorizations may create some potential for misperception, and perhaps even hostility. And Farhad and Sarah may even change their opinions about each other, forgetting that they really like each other as individuals, because they are now responding more as group members with opposing views.

Imagine now that while Farhad and Sarah are still talking, some students from another college, each wearing the hats and jackets of that school, show up in the student union. The presence of these outsiders might change the direction of social categorization entirely, leading both Farhad and Sarah to think of themselves as students at their own college. And this social categorization might lead them to become more aware of the positive characteristics of their college (the excellent rugby team, lovely campus, and intelligent students) in comparison with the characteristics of the other school. Now, rather than perceiving themselves as members of two different groups (men versus women), Farhad and Sarah might suddenly perceive themselves as members of the same social category (students at their college).

Perhaps this example will help you see the flexibility of social categorization. We sometimes think of our relationships with others at the individual level and sometimes at the group level. And which groups we use in social categorization can change over time and in different situations. You are more likely to categorize yourself as a member of your college or university when your rugby or football team has just won a really important game, or at your graduation ceremony, than you would on a normal evening out with your family. In these cases, your membership as a university student is simply more salient and important than it is every day, and you are more likely to categorize yourself accordingly.

Similar effects occur when we categorize other people. We tend to see people who belong to the same social group as more similar than they actually are, and we tend to judge people from different social groups as more different than they actually are.

**Development of Stereotypes**

Our stereotypes and prejudices are learned through many different processes. This multiplicity of causes is unfortunate.
because it makes stereotypes and prejudices even more likely to form and harder to change. For one, we learn our stereotypes in part through our communications with families and peers (Aboud & Doyle, 1996) and from the behaviors we see portrayed in the media (Brown, 1995). Even five-year-old children have learned cultural norms about the appropriate activities and behaviors for boys and girls and also have developed stereotypes about age, race, and physical attractiveness (Bigler & Liben, 2006). And there is often good agreement about the stereotypes of social categories among the individuals within a given culture. In one study assessing stereotypes, Stephanie Madon and her colleagues (Madon et al., 2001) presented U.S. college students with a list of 84 trait terms and asked them to indicate for which groups each trait seemed appropriate (Figure 14.4, “Current Stereotypes Held by College Students”). The participants tended to agree about what traits were true of which groups, and this was true even for groups of which the respondents were likely to never have met a single member (Arabs and Russians). Even today, there is good agreement about the stereotypes of members of many social groups, including men and women and a variety of ethnic groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Americans</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Italians</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materialistic</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>Musical</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>Loyal to family ties</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>Pleasure loving</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Tradition loving</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualistic</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>Loud</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure loving</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrious</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>Quick tempered</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Germans</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Jews</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>Very religious</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrious</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>Loyal to family ties</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalistic</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>Tradition loving</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>Reserved</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientifically minded</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>Shrewd</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>Industrious</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodical</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>Loyal to family ties</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>Tradition loving</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once they become established, stereotypes (like any other cognitive representation) tend to persevere. We begin to respond to members of stereotyped categories as if we already knew what they were like. Yaacov Trope and Eric Thompson (1997) found that individuals addressed fewer questions to members of categories about which they had strong stereotypes (as if they already knew what these people were like) and that the questions they did ask were likely to confirm the stereotypes they already had.

In other cases, stereotypes are maintained because information that confirms our stereotypes is better remembered than information that disconfirms them. When we see members of social groups perform behaviors, we tend to better remember information that confirms our stereotypes than we remember information that disconfirms our stereotypes (Fyock & Stangor, 1994). If we believe that women are bad drivers and we see a woman driving poorly, then we tend to remember it, but when we see a woman who drives particularly well, we tend to forget it. This illusory correlation is another example of the general principle of assimilation—we tend to perceive the world in ways that make it fit our existing beliefs more easily than we change our beliefs to fit the reality around us.

And stereotypes become difficult to change because they are so important to us—they become an integral and
important part of our everyday lives in our culture. Stereotypes are frequently expressed on TV, in movies, and in social media, and we learn a lot of our beliefs from these sources. Our friends also tend to hold beliefs similar to ours, and we talk about these beliefs when we get together with them (Schaller & Conway, 1999). In short, stereotypes and prejudice are powerful largely because they are important social norms that are part of our culture (Guimond, 2000).

Because they are so highly cognitively accessible, and because they seem so “right,” our stereotypes easily influence our judgments of and responses to those we have categorized. The social psychologist John Bargh once described stereotypes as “cognitive monsters” because their activation was so powerful and because the activated beliefs had such insidious influences on social judgment (Bargh, 1999). Making things even more difficult, stereotypes are strongest for the people who are in most need of change—the people who are most prejudiced (Lepore & Brown, 1997).

Because stereotypes and prejudice often operate out of our awareness, and also because people are frequently unwilling to admit that they hold them, social psychologists have developed methods for assessing them indirectly. In the Research Focus box following, we will consider two of these approaches—the bogus pipeline procedure and the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

Research Focus: Measuring Stereotypes Indirectly

One difficulty in measuring stereotypes and prejudice is that people may not tell the truth about their beliefs. Most people do not want to admit—either to themselves or to others—that they hold stereotypes or that they are prejudiced toward some social groups. To get around this problem, social psychologists make use of a number of techniques that help them measure these beliefs more subtly and indirectly.

One indirect approach to assessing prejudice is called the bogus pipeline procedure (Jones & Sigall, 1971). In this procedure, the experimenter first convinces the participants that he or she has access to their “true” beliefs, for instance, by getting access to a questionnaire that they completed at a prior experimental session. Once the participants are convinced that the researcher is able to assess their “true” attitudes, it is expected that they will be more honest in answering the rest of the questions they are asked because they want to be sure that the researcher does not catch them lying. Interestingly, people express more prejudice when they are in the bogus pipeline than they do when they are asked the same questions more directly, which suggests that we may frequently mask our negative beliefs in public.

Other indirect measures of prejudice are also frequently used in social psychological research; for instance, assessing nonverbal behaviors such as speech errors or physical closeness. One common measure involves asking participants to take a seat on a chair near a person from a different racial or ethnic group and measuring how far away the person sits (Sechrist & Stangor, 2001; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). People who sit farther away are assumed to be more prejudiced toward the members of the group.

Because our stereotypes are activated spontaneously when we think about members of different social groups, it is possible to use reaction-time measures to assess this activation and thus to learn about people’s stereotypes and prejudices. In these procedures, participants are asked to make a series of judgments about pictures or descriptions of social groups and then to answer questions as quickly as they can, but without making mistakes. The speed of these responses is used to determine an individual’s stereotypes or prejudice.
The most popular reaction-time implicit measure of prejudice—the Implicit Association Test (IAT)—is frequently used to assess stereotypes and prejudice (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2007). In the IAT, participants are asked to classify stimuli that they view on a computer screen into one of two categories by pressing one of two computer keys, one with their left hand and one with their right hand. Furthermore, the categories are arranged so that the responses to be answered with the left and right buttons either “fit with” (match) the stereotype or do not “fit with” (mismatch) the stereotype. For instance, in one version of the IAT, participants are shown pictures of men and women and are also shown words related to academic disciplines (e.g., History, French, or Linguistics for the Arts, or Chemistry, Physics, or Math for the Sciences). Then the participants categorize the photos (“Is this picture a picture of a man or a woman?”) and answer questions about the disciplines (“Is this discipline a science?”) by pressing either the Yes button or the No button using either their left hand or their right hand.

When the responses are arranged on the screen in a way that matches a stereotype, such that the male category and the “science” category are on the same side of the screen (e.g., on the right side), participants can do the task very quickly and they make few mistakes. It’s just easier, because the stereotypes are matched or associated with the pictures in a way that makes sense or is familiar. But when the images are arranged such that the female category and the “science” category are on the same side, whereas the men and the weak categories are on the other side, most participants make more errors and respond more slowly. The basic assumption is that if two concepts are associated or linked, they will be responded to more quickly if they are classified using the same, rather than different, keys.

Implicit association procedures such as the IAT show that even participants who claim that they are not prejudiced do seem to hold cultural stereotypes about social groups. Even Black people themselves respond more quickly to positive words that are associated with White rather than Black faces on the IAT, suggesting that they have subtle racial prejudice toward their own racial group.

Because they hold these beliefs, it is possible—although not guaranteed—that they may use them when responding to other people, creating a subtle and unconscious type of discrimination. Although the meaning of the IAT has been debated (Tetlock & Mitchell, 2008), research using implicit measures does suggest that—whether we know it or not, and even though we may try to control them when we can—our stereotypes and prejudices are easily activated when we see members of different social categories (Barden, Maddux, Petty, & Brewer, 2004).

Think About It…

Do you hold implicit prejudices? Try the Implicit Association Test yourself, here:
https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit

What did you discover? How did this make you feel?

Implicit Stereotypes

Over the last 30 years there has been growing research into the concept of implicit stereotypes. Particularly using the
Implicit Associations Test, it has been demonstrated that experimental participants show a response bias in support of a stereotypical association, such as “young” and “good” (and “old” and “bad”) indicating evidence of an implicit age stereotype. This has been found even for people who consciously reject the use of such stereotypes, and seek to be fair in their judgement of other people. This finding has been interpreted as a “cognitive bias”, implying an implicit prejudice within the individual. But implicit stereotypical associations (like any other implicit associations) can develop through the ordinary working of “the predictive brain”. The predictive brain is assumed to develop associations through experience of their prevalence in the social world of the perceiver. If the predictive brain were to sample randomly or comprehensively then stereotypical associations would not be picked up if they did not represent the state of the world. However, people are born into culture, and communicate within social networks. Thus, the implicit stereotypical associations picked up by an individual do not reflect a cognitive bias but the associations prevalent within their culture—evidence of “culture in mind”. Therefore to understand implicit stereotypes, research should examine more closely the way associations are communicated within social networks rather than focusing exclusively on an implied cognitive bias of the individual. [215]

Effects of Stereotyping

Traditionally a stereotype has been defined as overgeneralized attributes associated with the members of a social group (such as the reserved English or the geeky engineer), with the implication that it applies to all group members (Hinton, 2000). A large body of research, particularly in the United States of America (USA), has focused on the (negative) stereotypes of women and Blacks, which are linked to prejudice and discrimination in society (Nelson, 2009, Steele, 2010). Psychological researchers have sought to identify why certain people employed stereotypes and, in much of the twentieth century, they were viewed as due to a mental fallacy or misconception of a social group, an individual's “biased” cognition, resulting from proposed factors such as “simplicity” of thought (Koenig and King, 1964) and arising from upbringing and social motivation (particularly “authoritarianism”, Adorno et al., 1950).

A considerable amount of effort has been made subsequently to persuade people to avoid stereotype use, by highlighting its inaccuracy and unfairness (for example, Brown, 1965). However, since the 1960s, cognitive researchers, such as Tajfel (1969), have argued that stereotyping is a general feature of human social categorization. Despite this, it has been argued that individuals can consciously seek to avoid using negative stereotypes and maintain a non-prejudiced view of others (Devine, 1989; Schneider, 2004). Indeed, Fiske and Taylor (2013) claim that now only ten percent of the population (in Western democracies) employ overt stereotypes. Unfortunately, recent work, specifically using techniques such as the Implicit Associations Test (Greenwald et al., 1998), has shown that stereotypical associations can implicitly influence social judgement, even for people who consciously seek to avoid their use (Lai et al., 2016).

Although in some cases the stereotypes that are used to make judgments might actually be true of the individual being judged, in many other cases they are not. Stereotyping is problematic when the stereotypes we hold about a social group are inaccurate overall, and particularly when they do not apply to the individual who is being judged (Stangor, 1995). Stereotyping others is simply unfair. Even if many women are more emotional than are most men, not all are, and it is not right to judge any one woman as if she is.

In the end, stereotypes become self-fulfilling prophecies, such that our expectations about the group members make the stereotypes come true (Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). Once we believe that men make better leaders than women, we tend to behave toward men in ways that make it easier for them to lead. And we
behave toward women in ways that make it more difficult for them to lead. The result? Men find it easier to excel in leadership positions, whereas women have to work hard to overcome the false beliefs about their lack of leadership abilities (Phelan & Rudman, 2010). This is likely why female lawyers with masculine names are more likely to become judges (Coffey & McLaughlin, 2009) and masculine-looking applicants are more likely to be hired as leaders than feminine-looking applicants (von Stockhausen, Koeser, & Sczesny, 2013).

These self-fulfilling prophecies are ubiquitous—even teachers’ expectations about their students’ academic abilities can influence the students’ school performance (Jussim, Robustelli, & Cain, 2009).

Of course, you may think that you personally do not behave in these ways, and you may not. But research has found that stereotypes are often used out of our awareness, which makes it very difficult for us to correct them. Even when we think we are being completely fair, we may nevertheless be using our stereotypes to condone discrimination (Chen & Bargh, 1999). And when we are distracted or under time pressure, these tendencies become even more powerful (Stangor & Duan, 1991).

Furthermore, attempting to prevent our stereotype from coloring our reactions to others takes effort. We experience more negative affect (particularly anxiety) when we are with members of other groups than we do when we are with people from our own groups, and we need to use more cognitive resources to control our behavior because of our anxiety about revealing our stereotypes or prejudices (Butz & Plant, 2006; Richeson & Shelton, 2003). When we know that we need to control our expectations so that we do not unintentionally stereotype the other person, we may try to do so—but doing so takes effort and may frequently fail (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994).

Think About It…

Think back to your results from the implicit bias assessment. If you discovered biases, what stereotypes might have fed into that?

We have seen that social categorization is a basic part of human nature and one that helps us to simplify our social worlds, to draw quick (if potentially inaccurate) conclusions about others, and to feel good about ourselves. In many cases, our preferences for ingroups may be relatively harmless—we may prefer to socialize with people who share our race or ethnicity for instance, but without particularly disliking the others. But categorizing others may also lead to prejudice and discrimination, and it may even do so without our awareness. Because prejudice and discrimination are so harmful to so many people, we must all work to get beyond them.

Discrimination influences the daily life of its victims in areas such as employment, income, financial opportunities, housing and educational opportunities, and medical care. Even with the same level of education and years of experience, ethnic minorities in Canada are 40% less likely to receive callbacks for an interview following a job application (Oreopolous, 2011). Blacks have higher mortality rates than Whites for eight of the 10 leading causes of death in the United States (Williams, 1999) and have less access to and receive poorer-quality health care, even controlling for other variables such as level of health insurance. Suicide rates among lesbians and gays are substantially higher than rates for the general population, and it has been argued that this is in part due to the negative outcomes of prejudice, including negative attitudes and resulting social isolation (Halpert, 2002). And in some rare cases,
discrimination even takes the form of hate crimes such as gay bashing.

More commonly, members of minority groups also face a variety of small hassles, such as bad service in restaurants, being stared at, and being the target of jokes (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Byslma, 2003). But even these everyday “minor” forms of discrimination can be problematic because they may produce anger and anxiety among stigmatized group members and may lead to stress and other psychological problems (Klonoff, Landrine, & Campbell, 2000; Klonoff, Landrine, & Ullman, 1999). Stigmatized individuals who report experiencing more exposure to discrimination or other forms of unfair treatment also report more depression, anger, and anxiety and lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001).

Of course, most of us do try to keep our stereotypes and our prejudices out of mind, and we work hard to avoid discriminating (Richeson & Shelton, 2007). But even when we work to keep our negative beliefs under control, this does not mean that they easily disappear.

Getting Past Stereotypes

Now that we are aware of how stereotypes form, both consciously and unconsciously, what do we do? How do we change it? How are we, as educators making it a better world for the students and families we have the privilege to work with?

We can and do get past stereotypes, although doing so may take some effort on our part (Blair, 2002). There are a number of techniques that we can use to try to improve our attitudes toward outgroups, and at least some of them have been found to be effective. Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermens, and Russin (2000) found that students who practiced responding in nonstereotypical ways to members of other groups became better able to avoid activating their negative stereotypes on future occasions. And a number of studies have found that we become less prejudiced when we are exposed to and think about group members who have particularly positive or nonstereotypical characteristics. For instance, Blair, Ma, and Lenton (2001) asked their participants to imagine a woman who was “strong” and found that doing so decreased stereotyping of women. Similarly, Bodenhausen, Schwarz, Bless, and Wanke (1995) found that when White American students thought about positive Black role models—such as Oprah Winfrey and Michael Jordan—they became less prejudiced toward Blacks.

Think About It…

Think about stereotypes you might have (see last Food for Thought feature). What is something you can do to begin moving past these?

Reducing Discrimination by Changing Social Norms

One variable that makes us less prejudiced is education. People who are more educated express fewer stereotypes and prejudice in general. This is true for students who enroll in courses that are related to stereotypes and prejudice, such as a course on gender and ethnic diversity (Rudman, Ashmore, & Gary, 2001), and is also true more generally—education.
reduces prejudice, regardless of what particular courses you take (Sidanius, Sinclair, & Pratto, 2006).

The effects of education on reducing prejudice are probably due in large part to the new social norms that people are introduced to in school. Social norms define what is appropriate and inappropriate, and we can effectively change stereotypes and prejudice by changing the relevant norms about them.

The influence of social norms is powerful, and long-lasting changes in beliefs about outgroups will occur only if they are supported by changes in social norms. Prejudice and discrimination thrive in environments in which they are perceived to be the norm, but they die when the existing social norms do not allow it. And because social norms are so important, the behavior of individuals can help create or reduce prejudice and discrimination. Discrimination, prejudice, and even hate crimes such as gay bashing will be more likely to continue if people do not respond to or confront them when they occur.

What this means is that if you believe that prejudice is wrong, you must confront it when you see it happening. Taking steps to reduce prejudice is everyone’s duty—having a little courage can go a long way in this regard.

Reduction Prejudice through Intergroup Contact

One of the reasons that people may hold stereotypes and prejudices is that they view the members of outgroups as different from them. We may become concerned that our interactions with people from different racial groups will be unpleasant, and these anxieties may lead us to avoid interacting with people from those groups (Mallett, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008). What this suggests is that a good way to reduce prejudice is to help people create closer connections with members of different groups. People will be more favorable toward others when they learn to see those other people as more similar to them, as closer to the self, and to be more concerned about them.

The idea that intergroup contact will reduce prejudice, known as the contact hypothesis, is simple: If children from different ethnic groups play together in school, their attitudes toward each other should improve.
One important example of the use of intergroup contact to influence prejudice came about as a result of the important U.S. Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. In this case, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed, based in large part on the testimony of psychologists, that busing Black children to schools attended primarily by White children, and vice versa, would produce positive outcomes on intergroup attitudes, not only because it would provide Black children with access to better schools, but also because the resulting intergroup contact would reduce prejudice between Black and White children. This strategy seemed particularly appropriate at the time it was implemented because most schools in the United States then were highly segregated by race.

The strategy of busing was initiated after the Supreme Court decision, and it had a profound effect on schools in the United States. For one, the policy was very effective in changing school makeup—the number of segregated schools decreased dramatically during the 1960s after the policy was begun. Busing also improved the educational and occupational achievement of Blacks and increased the desire of Blacks to interact with Whites; for instance, by forming cross-race friendships (Stephan, 1999). Overall, then, the case of desegregating schools in the United States supports the expectation that intergroup contact, at least in the long run, can be successful in changing attitudes. Nevertheless, as a result of several subsequent U.S. Supreme Court decisions, the policy of desegregating schools via busing was not continued past the 1990s.

Although student busing to achieve desegregated schools represents one prominent example of intergroup contact, such contact occurs in many other areas as well. Taken together, there is substantial support for the effectiveness of intergroup contact in improving group attitudes in a wide variety of situations, including schools, work organizations, military forces, and public housing. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) conducted a meta-analysis in which they reviewed over 500 studies that had investigated the effects of intergroup contact on group attitudes. They found that attitudes toward groups that were in contact became more positive over time. Furthermore, positive effects of contact were found on both stereotypes and prejudice and for many different types of contacted groups.

The positive effects of intergroup contact may be due in part to increases in other-concern. Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) found that leading students to take the perspective of another group member—which increased empathy and closeness to the person—also reduced prejudice.

When we get past group memberships and focus more on the individuals in the groups, we begin to see that there is a
great deal of variability among the group members and that our global and undifferentiating group stereotypes are actually not that informative (Rothbart & John, 1985). Successful intergroup contact tends to reduce the perception of outgroup homogeneity. Contact also helps us feel more positively about the members of the other group, and this positive affect makes us like them more. [222]

When working with young children, educators and caregivers may need to help scaffold this understanding and be really aware of who is represented (and who is not) in the materials in the classroom. Children bring ideas about “others” they have acquired settings and that may be supported in the materials in their homes, communities, and even the classroom. Consider this example:

Emma, Rakesha, and Annie all choose the dramatic play area as they make their plans for the day. Each of them has noticed the shiny new crowns their teachers have added to the dress-up clothes shelves since yesterday.

“Look at me. I’m a princess,” says Annie as she twirls in front of the mirror with a crown on her head. “Me, too,” adds Rakesha, choosing another of the crowns. “Mine has jewels.”

Emma, who has light skin and light hair and often takes the lead in assigning dramatic play roles, looks at both girls and states emphatically, “No!” She turns to Rakesha, who has darker skin and darker hair, and says, “You can’t be a princess because you don’t look like one. You have to look like the one in the princess book.”

Rakesha protests, “I can, too, be a princess! Everybody can be a princess.” The three girls continue to argue loudly about who can be a princess, and Ms. Denisha comes over to help them work out their disagreement. She sits down on the rug and motions to all three girls to sit down around her. She observes, “You girls look and sound pretty upset. What is the problem? Rakesha, why don’t you tell us first what made you feel so upset?”

Rakesha repeats Emma’s assertion that Rakesha can’t be a princess. Emma and Annie both add details to the story of the argument. Ms. Denisha listens, asks questions, and restates the problem. She then tells them, "It really hurt Rakesha’s feelings when you told her she couldn’t be a princess. Rakesha was right. People with any skin and hair colors can be princesses and other special characters. We can find books about many kinds of princesses. Now, I will stay and help you think of some ideas for your play this morning." [223]

In classrooms with older children, teachers can use the jigsaw classroom, an approach to learning in which students from different racial or ethnic groups work together, in an interdependent way, to master material. The class is divided into small learning groups, where each group is diverse in ethnic and gender composition. The assigned material to be learned is divided into as many parts as there are students in the group, and members of different groups who are assigned the same task meet together to help develop a strong report. Each student then learns his or her own part of the material and presents this piece of the puzzle to the other members of his or her group. The students in each group are therefore interdependent in learning all the material. A wide variety of techniques, based on principles of the jigsaw classroom, are in use in many schools around the world, and research studying these approaches has found that cooperative, interdependent experiences among students from different social groups are effective in reducing negative stereotyping and prejudice (Stephan, 1999). [224]