Chapter 3
How Do We React to Cultural Difference?

“In a world of cultural differences… there’s no such thing as ‘common’ sense.’ – Carla Vankoughnett – author, poet, musician, artist, teacher

This chapter focuses on exploring the barriers to intercultural competence. While the positive aspects of culture are discussed throughout this book, theories which explain the development of stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination will be explored along with concepts such as power, privilege, conscious and unconscious bias, racism and sexism. Social inequalities are more carefully considered along with text which links the development of IC to overcoming the challenges of cultural difference. This chapter encourages you to consider your own experiences with these topics and concludes by considering methods for reducing prejudice and discrimination and enhancing relationships between people from different cultures.

Learning outcomes:

By reading this chapter and completing the tasks you will be able to:

- Describe the way in which prejudices form;
- Distinguish between prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination;
- Identify the problem with positive stereotypes;
- Distinguish between implicit and explicit prejudice;
- Explain racism and sexism and other societal ‘isms;
- Identify the ways in which social norms, social identity, and group conflict theory can explain the development of prejudice;
- Recognize the ways in which power and privilege contribute to perpetuating discrimination;
- Analyze your own experiences in relation to concepts within this chapter;
- Identify the ways in which contact theory can be instructive in breaking down prejudices and enhancing intercultural competence.
Maria, who is from a Roma background, had recently moved to England and began experiencing health problems. She went to an urgent care clinic and was diagnosed with a medical condition that needed ongoing monitoring. The clinic told her she needed to find a primary care doctor that she could visit regularly to obtain prescriptions for her condition. She began visiting local doctors’ offices to find a doctor, however, each time she visited a practice, she was told they had no space available for new patients. Having exhausted her options, she returned to the urgent care clinic and told them her problem. The nurse rang the first local practice that Maria had visited, told the practice they had a patient to refer and asked if they were taking any new patients. The practice said that “yes, they had space available for new patients”. So did the next practice that the nurse called; and the next one. It appeared that Maria was being discriminated against by being turned away because of prejudices held by the staff members about people from Roma backgrounds.

The above example of discrimination, or treating someone differently based upon their group membership, is based on a true story and is not unique. People from Roma backgrounds have been highlighted as suffering from health care discrimination in the UK (Noor 2019) and across Europe (e.g., Watson and Downe 2017). People around the world from a variety of backgrounds are similarly discriminated against on a regular basis. Why do people discriminate against others? Are people always conscious that they are discriminating? How might we address the problem of discrimination in our society? It is these and other questions to which this chapter now turns.

Discrimination and its associated concepts: stereotyping and prejudice, are crucial topics in the study of intercultural competence because they block our efforts to become more interculturally competent. In order to develop IC, we believe, it is necessary not only to understand these terms, but to self-reflect on the extent to which your own beliefs about, and attitudes towards, other people impact your behavior towards them. While you may think that you do not stereotype others, do not hold prejudices and do not discriminate, most people do—to greater and lesser extents—as a by-product of living within our societies. Few people can get through life without holding stereotypes or without being the subject of stereotypes themselves. Holding such stereotypes and prejudices and being unaware of them is often referred to as unconscious bias and is widely discussed in the literature (e.g., Lee 2005; Ross 2008; Teal et al. 2012). The key is commonly thought to be enhancing awareness of our own biases and taking steps to reduce their impact.

As discussed in previous chapters, the experience of meeting and working with people from different cultures can be a hugely positive experience. Differences can be personally enriching but also financially beneficial for organizations. While we do not wish to underestimate the benefits that cultural differences can bring, the focus of this chapter is to help you to understand the flip side; that is, what it is about cultural differences that can cause difficulties. For decades, social psychologists—alongside
those in other academic fields—have been studying what happens when people are in the presence of cultural difference. Although we may like to think positively about cultural difference, there are some normal human processes that take over and make most of us less interested in and comfortable with cultural difference than we might like to be.

Prejudice: What Is It?

In its most basic form, prejudice means to prejudge someone (based on the Latin praet and judicium). Pick up any introductory Social Psychology textbook and you will find very similar definitions of prejudice based upon this idea of prejudgement (e.g., Aronson et al. 2018; Crisp and Turner 2014). Prejudice is a negative or hostile attitude towards an individual based upon their group membership. The attitudes that form prejudice have often been theorized as having three components including: cognitions (beliefs or thoughts), emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety) along with the relative intensity of those emotions (e.g., mild discomfort, raging hostility), and behaviors which are acted out by people (Allport 1954). It is unusual for people to have attitudes about something and not act them out. For instance, if you have a negative attitude towards people who are homeless, you are likely to avoid homeless people or treat them in other negative ways.

It is important to emphasize that prejudice is an attitude about someone based exclusively on the group to which they belong. So, in our example above, if we say someone is prejudiced against the homeless, we mean that the person is inclined to behave in ways that are hostile or unfriendly towards any homeless person they encounter because they view all homeless people as possessing the same characteristics. The characteristics that the person will attribute to homeless people are most often negative and are assumed to apply to the entire group. This assumption about people who are in certain groups is known as a stereotype, which is the cognitive component of prejudice meaning that it reflects our thoughts. The emotional component of prejudice, in this case hostility, combines with the cognitive component of prejudice (stereotype) and can influence our behavior and result in us discriminating which is the behavioral component of prejudice.

We are all at times victims of prejudice and discrimination based upon our group membership even if we do not know it. Prejudices can be based upon any characteristic such as age, race, sex, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, body size, disability, accent, hair style and color and so on. Take a moment to reflect more carefully on the discriminatory results of prejudice by having a look at Thought Box 3.1.
Thought Box 3.1 Identifying discrimination

Consider the following scenarios and mark those that you think are examples of discrimination.

- You recently relocated to Chile and apply for an apartment to rent. The landlord informs you that he will not rent to you if you do not have credit references or a history of tenancy in Chile.
- You are Muslim and you wear traditional clothing. You arrange an appointment to view an apartment for rent. When you arrive in your traditional Muslim headscarf and clothing to look at the property, you are told the apartment is rented, but the advertisement saying that the apartment is still “For Rent”, continues to run in the newspaper and the sign continues to be displayed on the property.
- You are a well-dressed Black man and are hailing a taxi on a street in London. Five unoccupied taxis pass you by without stopping. A well-dressed white man comes out of a building and hails a taxi a little down the street from you. The first taxi that comes along stops.
- You are a white British man and you have just completed an interview for a job. It went well and the interviewer suggests that you can expect a positive outcome. The following day you run into the interviewer while out with your wife who is of Middle Eastern descent. The interviewer acts coolly when you introduce him to your wife and is cagey about the results of your interview. You don’t get the job and wonder if has anything to do with your wife.

If you have not already worked it out, all the situations in Thought Box 3.1 could be instances of discrimination. Sometimes you will not know for sure. For instance, maybe the five taxis that passed you already had jobs they were going to, while the guy who just came out of the building next to you just happened to get one that didn’t. It is worth noting that, although discrimination is typically thought to occur when a minority group member is treated negatively by a majority group member, discrimination is also possible the other way around, when a person from a minority group discriminates against someone from a majority group or discriminates against someone from another minority group. For example, Dr Vivienne Lyfar-Cissé was dismissed from her role as Associate Director of a race equality program at a UK National Health Service Trust for bullying and harassing a white colleague, telling him that he was “everything she despised in a white manager” (Baska 2019). She was fired by Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals in 2017 after a one-year investigation into claims of discrimination, bullying and victimization of a white manager as well as three other cases filed against her for bullying and victimizing a female colleague in relation to her sexual orientation (Baska 2019; Gov.uk 2019a). Cases in which members of societies that considered privileged are the targets of discrimination, are fewer and further between, however, they are still examples of discrimination. That said, they do not represent the kind of widespread systemic discrimination seen across societies and institutions against people with certain characteristics (e.g., racism, sexism).
Around the world we have seen great strides being made in terms of reducing prejudice. The number of people who report that they think black people are inferior to white, women are inferior to men, and gay people are inferior to straight people has been declining over the years (Weaver 2008). We can see it ourselves in the election of a black president in the US, the hiring of women into executive level positions, and the increasing acceptance of gay and lesbian people with the passage of same-sex marriage in various places. However, issues of prejudice persist with some believing that reduction in negative feelings against minority groups has led to the rise in negativity towards majority groups, so that while there might be a decline in anti-black bias, there may be a rise in anti-white bias (Norton and Sommers 2011; Wilkins and Kaiser 2014).

**Stereotypes: How Do We Group Individuals?**

A *stereotype* is commonly defined as a generalization about people who belong to a particular group in which it is believed that certain traits describe all the members of the group, with individual variation ignored (Stangor 2009). In other words, people in that group are expected to be pretty much the same. We all hold stereotypes although, depending upon the society in which you grew up, they may be somewhat different with some being more accessible than others, depending upon your personal experiences and exposure to the media. Take a moment to reflect on a few group categories in Thought Box 3.2.

**Thought Box 3.2 Reflections on stereotypes**

Think for a moment about the groups of people listed below. How do they look? What are their typical characteristics? Be sure to get a picture in your mind of each before reading on.

- Terrorists
- Corporate executives
- Ballet dancers
- Construction workers
- Football players
- Car mechanics

Although there may be some variation in what you imagined for each of the people mentioned in Thought Box 3.2, it is unlikely that your idea of a ballet dancer would be anything other than a young slim athletic looking woman and a football player would be anything other than a young athletic man. It would also be unusual if you described the car mechanic as a young woman or the terrorist as an older white Jewish man. Further, you would not tend to think of a construction worker as driven, astute, and wealthy, but you are likely to associate those characteristics with a corporate executive. These are stereotypes. Our stereotypes influence our perceptions of and/or behavior towards others, even if we are not aware of it. Have a look at Thought Box 3.3 to consider another common stereotype.
Thought Box 3.3 Family and surgery

Consider the following scenario (Oakhill et al. 2005) and try to determine what the relationship is between the boy and the doctor.

A boy and his father are driving home one day when they get into a major car accident. The father dies but the boy is rushed into the hospital in need of emergency surgery. Just as he is about to go into surgery, the surgeon walks in, stops and says, “I can’t operate – this boy is my son!”

If you struggled with the answer to Thought Box 3.3, you are in good company. That scenario was presented to participants in a study of gender stereotypes. Overwhelmingly, people who were presented with this scenario were stumped because the father had died in the car accident. Most could not imagine that the surgeon was the boy’s mother (Oakhill et al. 2005). This example demonstrates the extreme power of stereotypes in influencing our thinking about what people in particular groups are like. While rationally we know that any kind of person can fall into any kind of category, we categorize based on what we see as the norm. As discussed in Chap. 2, norms are what is typical or common among a group of people.

Stereotypes tend to be negative. For example, Americans are often viewed by the British as loud and insincere, while the British are often seen by Americans as stuffy and reserved. An interesting point to consider is exactly why we tend to stereotype people negatively? For example, why can’t Americans be stereotyped as being friendly instead of loud and insincere and why can’t the British be stereotyped as respectful instead of stuffy and reserved? We shall come to this a little later.

We have been discussing stereotypes more in negative connotations; however, we do find that there are some positive stereotypes. Let’s reflect on one in Thought Box 3.4.

Thought Box 3.4 Positive stereotypes of women

Stereotypes are usually, though not always, negative. One stereotype of women that is more positive is that they tend to be kind, nurturing and family focused. Is there any reason why such a positive stereotype could be problematic for women? Please reflect.

In Thought Box 3.4, you may have struggled to come up with some ideas regarding why the positive stereotype of women can be problematic. It relates to sexism which is looking at someone as inferior based on sex. Usually sexism is thought of as hostile in nature (hostile sexism) with men thinking of women as irrational and weak and usurping the power of men (a negative stereotype of women) which can manifest itself in the form of abuse and harassment (Glick and Fiske 2001). However, the
positive stereotype of women as warm, nurturing, gentle, and family-oriented can also have negative consequences. Such positive stereotypes can be patronizing and restrict women to specific roles (e.g., wife, mother, teacher) and justify the social dominance of males (Jim Sidanius et al. 1995). These positive stereotypes of women are thought of as benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske 2001). Although this might be attractive to women in some ways, many do not realize the way in which it can also be limiting.

To provide another example, a common positive stereotype found among certain segments of the population in the United States has to do with Asian Americans who are often thought of as being hardworking, ambitious, and intelligent. They are sometimes, in fact, called a “model minority” (Kiang et al. 2017). While this may sound flattering, many Asian Americans are unhappy with this stereotype since it sets up expectations about academic achievement to which many do not aspire. Further, it can be insulting because it groups them all into one category: Asian (Thompson and Kiang 2010), ignoring the fact that some have roots in Thailand, while others are Chinese, Korean, Japanese and so on. It is bit like saying that the French, the Germans, the Spanish and the Portuguese are all the same because they are European—rather ridiculous. Another example is when immigrants from Africa are perceived as one group completely overlooking the fact that the continent of Africa is made up of many different countries.

To provide another example of a positive stereotype which could be insulting, let’s talk about stereotypes of basketball players. Let’s say, you are visiting the US and, if you don’t know, basketball is an incredibly popular sport in the US and is often played by tall, black men. So, if you meet a tall black man in the US and assume, he is a basketball player, he may be quite insulted. But why? Wouldn’t it be a good thing to assume that someone is good at a major sport like basketball? Consider that not only may this man not like basketball or even play it, he may be a doctor or a lawyer or a teacher or have some other profession, but this may be overlooked due to the stereotype!

**Why Do We Stereotype?**

Stereotyping is a well-established concept in Social Psychology. Before we discuss where stereotypes come from, take a moment to ponder that question yourself in Thought Box 3.5.

**Thought Box 3.5 Why do we stereotype?**

Think through what you know about stereotyping so far. Why do you think we stereotype people?
If you have learned something about stereotyping in school, college or university, you might have heard that stereotyping is sometimes described as the “law of least effort”. The world is a complicated place and it is impossible for us to have differentiated attitudes about everything and everyone that we come across (Allport 1954). Categorizing people according to stereotypes benefits us in two ways. First, it allows us to expend less mental energy. Some have described our tendency to stereotype as being “cognitive misers” (Pennington 2000). Stereotyping allows us to quickly assess a new person, attributing to them a host of characteristics associated with the stereotype which then allows us to free our minds to concentrate on other things (Macrae et al. 1994). Second, stereotyping allows us to make assumptions about new people so that we think we know something about them (Turner et al. 1987), which reduces uncertainty so we believe we know what to expect and how people will behave and we understand how to relate to the person (Hogg 2000).

These categories that we generate for groups of people relate back to Chap. 2 where we discussed the way in which we develop our identities. We develop our social identities by figuring out what groups we belong to and what groups we do not belong to. The groups that we belong to are our ingroups, while the groups that we do not belong to are our outgroups. Interestingly, we tend to view people in outgroups as more similar to one another than they actually are which is known in psychology as outgroup homogeneity effect (OHE) (Jones et al. 1981). The phenomena, own-race-bias (ORB), suggests that we can more easily tell apart members of our own race than other races (Meissner and Brigham 2001). So, for example, white people generally have a hard time telling Asian people apart, while Asian people have a hard time telling white people apart. There are different explanations for this, one being that we simply have more experience with those from our own group compared to those from other groups (Linville et al. 1989). However, what it tells us is that there are psychological mechanisms in place which serve to make our stereotypes stronger!

Stereotypes can also be reinforced when we meet people that we categorize as being members of particular groups, even if they exhibit behaviors that are different from what we expect. This is because the information about them that is consistent with our stereotypes is given more attention and recalled more often and more easily than information about the person that contradicts our stereotypes. A study by Cohen (1981), for example, showed participants the exact same film of a woman’s birthday dinner. In one group participants were told the woman was a waitress and in the other they were told the woman was a librarian. In the first group participants more often remembered seeing the woman drinking (which is associated more with waitressing), while in the latter participants remembered the woman wearing glasses (which is more often associated with librarians) (Cohen 1981). Such studies provide evidence suggesting that characteristics or behaviors that are inconsistent with our stereotypes are classified as an exception or simply ignored.

Stereotyping, the cognitive component of prejudice, is a normal part of the human condition. Our minds are programmed to put people into categories based on certain characteristics (Brewer 2007; Dovidio and Gaertner 2010). Social neuroscience research tells us that we begin categorizing people from infancy (Cikara and Van Bavel 2014). For example, research finds that while newborn babies (0-3 months)
do not have a preference for faces of one race or another, they will begin to show a preference for faces of their own race by as young as three months old (Anzures et al. 2013). If they often see faces of other races, however, then they do not show a preference for faces of people of their own race. This suggests that from the beginning of our lives, we have the ability to categorize people, but that our experience with people influences the formation of these categories.

While categorizing or stereotyping individuals is a normal part of the human condition, it is further reinforced by society. This may come in the form of stereotypes passed onto you from your parents or friends who may have certain views of people who belong to particular groups. Within different cultures, what people regard as stereotypes for different groups (Buddhists, cheerleaders, homeless people, terrorists, etc.) may differ somewhat depending upon those around them; however, they tend to be somewhat similar because of the global media (e.g., television, movies, and the internet), which perpetuates stereotypes of particular groups. Think of how many films with world-wide popularity have been made that portray Muslim men as terrorists. Now think of how many similar films have been made which portray Muslim men as caring husbands and fathers, artists, philanthropists, football players, ballet dancers or police officers. The media serves to perpetuate our stereotypes of many different groups.

**Can Stereotypes Ever Be Useful?**

Because there are a myriad of problems with stereotypes, it would seem as if they should be completely condemned. Indeed, stereotyping is dangerous because it leads us to make incorrect assumptions about people we meet and stops us from getting to know people as individuals. Stereotyping can also lead to prejudice and discrimination as we categorize people into outgroups, and then treat them differently based upon their group membership. So while stereotypes are dangerous, let’s put our critical thinking caps on and consider whether or not they can ever be useful by looking at Thought Box 3.6.

**Thought Box 3.6 Is there a positive side of stereotypes?**

While we have discussed many negative things about stereotypes, can you think of how they might be at all accurate or useful? If so, how?
Were you successful at coming up with ideas in Thought box 3.6 about how stereotypes could be useful? Although not always obvious, the categories, or stereotypes, we generate about groups of people can indeed be useful in some ways. First, there is a grain of truth in stereotyping because many (but not all) people in particular groups will be accurately described by some characteristics. We have seen evidence of this in some studies such as those by Hofstede (2001), in which he found that people in some countries tend to be more individualistic, while in others, people tend to be more collectivistic. In reference to the stereotype above about black basketball players, about three-quarters of US basketball players are actually black (Spears 2016). There is some truth to stereotypes, which is part of the reason why we have them. Because there is some truth to them, we believe that they have the potential to be useful, if used with caution and with the knowledge that not all people from particular groups conform to stereotypes about them. For example, if you know that often Orthodox Jewish men do not shake hands with women for religious reasons, you may avoid an awkward situation by not offering to shake the hand of an Orthodox Jewish man that you have just met. In this way, you have adapted to the person in front of you and, in fact, acted in a more interculturally competent way. Adaptation, as you will see later, is a key component of intercultural competence. Thus, if you know that people from a particular group often behave in a certain way, then it could help you to understand their behavior and adapt your own behavior accordingly. But of course, you should not be surprised if they do not act in the way that you anticipate!

**Emotions: How Do We Feel About People?**

Some people may hold prejudices but not feel particularly strongly about them so they can be easily swayed. Seline, a student of one of your co-authors (Lantz-Deaton) recently relayed a conversation she had with her friend, Ariel, in which they were talking about religion. When the topic of Buddhism came up, Ariel said that Buddhists were just a bunch of vegans who were obsessive about not stepping on bugs. Containing her annoyance at the stereotype, Seline told her friend that she often attends Buddhist meditation sessions and has found their teachings useful. Although Ariel was surprised, she was also interested and asked if she could join Seline the next time she went to meditation.

In the above case, it didn’t take much to help Ariel to reconsider her prejudiced attitude and to get her to explore something different. But, of course, this is often not so easy, especially with people who hold very deep-seated prejudices. When people hold strong attitudes, it can be quite difficult to have a conversation with them because logic goes out the window. This is thought to be caused by the emotional component of their attitude or how strongly they feel about a topic. This is very well illustrated through an example given by Allport (1954, pp. 13–14) more than half a century ago (see Thought Box 3.7).
**Thought Box 3.7 The strength of prejudice**

Consider the following conversation between Mr X and Mr Y and then answer the questions to follow.

*Mr X*: *The trouble with Jews is that they only take care of their own group.*

*Mr Y*: *But the record of the Community Chest campaign shows that they gave more generously, in proportion to their numbers, to the general charities of the community than did non-Jews.*

*Mr X*: *That shows they are always trying to buy favour and intrude into Christian affairs. They think of nothing but money; that is why there are so many Jewish bankers.*

*Mr Y*: *But a recent study shows that the percentage of Jews in the banking business is negligible, far smaller than the percentage of non-Jews.*

*Mr X*: *That’s just it; they don’t go in for respectable business; they are only in the movie business or run nightclubs.* (Adapted from Allport, 1954, p. 13-14)

Do you think Mr X’s prejudice is strong or weak? How can you tell?

How does Mr X evaluate Mr Y’s evidence?

Is there anything that you think Mr Y can do to strengthen his argument? What might that be?

In the scenario above, it may or may not have been clear to you that Mr X holds strong prejudices about Jews and that his emotions are clouding his judgement. Either he ignores facts presented by Mr Y, he distorts facts or changes the focus of the argument. While Mr Y might offer additional evidence about Jews, it is likely that this would continue to have no impact upon Mr X because his prejudice is very strong and he would continue to use emotional reasoning, which does not truly involve considering the evidence and rethinking his position. Emotional reasoning only serves to reinforce his views.

Research suggests that it is very common for people to be highly subjective in their interpretation of information with emotions, needs, and self-concepts clouding the perception of facts (Fine 2008; Westen et al. 2006). If we run into information that does not support a view on which we feel very strongly, we feel threatened and our tendency is to ignore or distort the information so that we can maintain our position. This is essentially why prejudices are so difficult to change. We tend to only pay attention to information that supports our own views and ignore or distort information that does not. Take a moment to think more deeply about your own prejudices in the Thought Box 3.8.
Thought Box 3.8 Your prejudices

Think about a group of people that you hold strong views about. This can be a group based on any characteristic (e.g., ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, weight, accent, nationality). Consider the following questions:

How did your prejudice originate?

What might be contributing to you maintaining this prejudice?

To what extent do you recognize that this prejudice may not be based on logic or may be subjective?

What might you do to reduce or eliminate this prejudice?

Prejudices can be difficult to recognize and hard to change. As Allport described back in 1954, even if we recognize logically at some point that our prejudices are wrong because they conflict with actual evidence, they are so deeply ingrained in us that they are likely to persist even when we know they are wrong. While surveys suggest that prejudice has declined in many ways, this may demonstrate more of a decline in explicit prejudice, that is attitudes that we are aware of and freely express (Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2012; Greenwald and Banaji 1995; Hahn and Gawronski 2014). However, we may be moving towards societies with more implicit prejudice, that is; that even when we know a prejudice is wrong, we still discriminate against people because our attitudes are automatic and at times unintentional, and so we keep discriminating even when we may not realize it (Dovidio and Gaertner 2008).

Let’s take a hypothetical example of Cloe, a white Australian student attending university in Australia. Cloe expresses an explicit attitude that people from different races are equal. She even exhibits behaviors that are consistent with this attitude. For instance, in Australia where there are problems with racism against Aborigines,
she signs petitions in support of Aboriginal causes and talks to people about ways to address racism against Aborigines. However, within Cloe’s culture, there is a lot of negativity about Aboriginal people which may have influenced her in ways that she does not realize (Xu et al. 2014). Despite her explicitly positive attitude and accompanying behaviors, she may, for instance, feel uncomfortable around people from Aboriginal backgrounds and make less eye contact and interact with them less than people from her own culture.

Another, very recent example of implicit prejudice can be seen in politicians and news presenters who insist on referring to the COVID-19 virus as “the Chinese virus”. Some people point to the fact that the flu of 1918 is often referred to as the Spanish flu (although, in actuality it did not even originate in Spain) and use it as an argument that COVID-19 can be called the Chinese virus. Our understanding of equality, diversity, and inclusion has advanced over the past 100 years. Even if it is a proven fact that the virus originated in China, this does not justify the use of ethnicity to refer to it and can incite racist attitudes in others making the Chinese targets of blame, suspicion, and abuse. Evidence of this can be found in the increase in hate crimes against the Chinese after this label was applied. Beyond inciting racism, however, consider how you would feel if a worldwide pandemic was named after your country. Would it make you feel proud or ashamed to be from that country? Likely, it would be the latter. Labelling COVID-19 “the Chinese virus” is a form of implicit prejudice, meaning that it is more subtle and indirect (see Fazio et al. 1995; McConnell and Leibold 2001), which may be why some people cannot easily find a problem with it. While implicit prejudice may be subtle, it can be just as damaging as prejudice that is out in the open for all to see.

It is worth mentioning that you may sometimes hear implicit prejudice referred to as unconscious bias (e.g., Teal et al. 2012). This more clearly defines it as beyond our awareness. Part of the task in learning about implicit prejudice or unconscious bias and developing our IC is becoming aware of our biases and working toward controlling them. Consider your own experience with implicit prejudices in the Thought Box 3.9.
Thought Box 3.9 Implicit prejudices

| Can you give an example of a time when you may have demonstrated an implicit prejudice? What happened? Why do you think you did it? How did you feel? Do you think the other person was aware of how they were being treated differently? What might you do to bring implicit prejudices like that into your awareness in future? |

| Can you give an example of a time when you think that you may have been the target of an implicit prejudice. What happened? How did you feel? Do you think the other person was aware that they were treating you differently? How do you know? |

While implicit prejudice is generally thought to be unconscious, people can still be prejudiced and be aware of it but express it in more subtle ways because it has become less socially acceptable to express overt prejudice. The question is really one of awareness. Are you completely unaware that you hold prejudices and inadvertently treat people differently because of them, or do you know you hold prejudices and discriminate against others anyway in subtle ways? We hope it is the former, and up to this point you have been unaware of your implicit prejudices and are reading this because you want to learn and improve. For the purpose of IC development, it is important for you to recognize how your prejudices might be operating outside of your awareness so that you can learn to recognize and control them. Before leaving this topic, consider the scenario in Thought Box 3.10.
Thought Box 3.10 Implicit or explicit prejudice

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese people became the target of prejudice and discrimination when government officials intentionally labeled COVID-19 as the Chinese virus. On the social media site Facebook, a US citizen posted a film clip of an Asian person eating live sea creatures with the caption “Can you believe this?” It was posted without context or any other commentary. Comments made on the film by this person’s friends included “What’s wrong with those people?” and “It’s their fault we are in this mess!” and “Disgusting, who would do that?”.

What kind of message do you think this film was sending? What do you think these people were thinking who made these comments? Do you think the person who posted this film intentionally wanted to encourage prejudice, discrimination, or racism? Why or why not?

The scenario in Thought Box 3.10 is tricky, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the person who posted the film did not overtly make negative statements about people from Chinese backgrounds. However, the film portrays an Asian person, who people might think is Chinese, engaging in an act that people in the US would generally tend to view negatively because they do not have live food as part of their national cuisine. The statements made by so-called Facebook friends, did not directly mention the Chinese. However, both the film and the comments can be viewed as implicitly encouraging prejudice, discrimination, and racism though it may or may not have been obvious to the participants.

Behaviors: How Do We Discriminate by Treating Others Differently?

As mentioned earlier, the behavioral component of prejudice is discrimination, that is treating someone differently because of their group membership. Discrimination can be based on explicit or implicit attitudes and may therefore be overt or obvious, or it may be covert or hidden, or it may occur unconsciously. With the passage of laws in many countries protecting people from unfair discrimination, overt discrimination is on the decline in many places. However, even in countries with more advanced legislation, there is still overwhelming evidence to demonstrate that discrimination continues.

Discrimination is most discussed and researched in relation to ethnicity/race and gender in part because they are visible characteristics. In other words, it is easy to look and readily identify someone’s gender and race. Therefore, we will focus
on these two types of discrimination. Of course, as we have discussed, there are other characteristics that are also visible and can lead to discrimination like weight and physical disability, but historically they have not impacted as many people or been as widely researched as gender and race. Invisible characteristics, or those that are not always visibly apparent (e.g., religion, education, hidden disability, sexual orientation), also lead to discrimination but tend to require more information (with some exceptions) (Van Knippenberg and Schippers 2007) and so are not as often discussed in the literature.

**Sexism**

Sexism is prejudice and discrimination based upon a person’s gender. Most of the research on sexism has focused upon women as the targets of prejudice and discrimination (Deaux and LaFrance 1998). This is partially because historically women have been more often the victims of unfair treatment owing to their lower positions in most societies in comparison to men. That is not to say that men cannot or do not suffer sexism!

As discussed above, women and men are subject to stereotypes. Research into the stereotypes has shown that women are generally thought to be nice but incompetent while men are thought to be competent but perhaps not so nice. Such beliefs are found in a variety of different cultures across Europe, North and South America, Australia and parts of the Middle East (Deaux 1985).

Stereotypes and their accompanying prejudices lead women to be treated in inferior ways compared to men which—as discussed—can involve both _hostile sexism_ with a view of women as irrational and weak and deserving of being dominated as well as _benevolent sexism_ with the view of women as warm, nurturing, gentle and family oriented and in need of protection (Glick and Fiske 2001). Whether sexism is benevolent or hostile, it has profound implications for women, because women are thought of in stereotypical terms which are associated with particular types of roles (to greater and lesser degrees) across societies. Historically, women were thought of as wives, mothers, and caregivers and, accordingly, most focused on the task of taking care of home and family while men went out to work to obtain resources to support the family. However, times are changing, and, in many countries, women today are working, but often in roles that are viewed as more feminine and are typically not as lucrative as roles dominated by men. For instance, across Europe, men dominate in construction (91% male), transport (80% male), industry (69% male), and agriculture (65% male), while women are found more often in the health industry (77% female) or education (67% female) (Eurofound 2013). Women are found overwhelmingly in lower-paid, part-time positions in service sector jobs, while men are predominantly found in full-time and more highly paid positions in manual and professional roles (Acker 2006; Hakim 1995; Office of National Statistics 2013; Reskin 1993). This division of men and women in particular types of jobs is known as _horizontal_
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Segregation (Blackburn et al. 2002; Reskin 1993) and is largely, although not exclusively, based upon the discriminatory behavior of hiring managers who view men and women in stereotypical terms and hold prejudices about what they should and shouldn’t do in terms of work roles.

There are many studies that demonstrate the discrimination suffered by women in the hiring process. For instance, one study looked at science professors at top US universities who were reviewing applications for laboratory manager roles. The applications submitted for these positions were the same except that one-half had women’s names at the top and one-half had men’s names at the top. The professors rated what they thought were male applicants as significantly more competent than female candidates and were more likely to hire them and offer them higher starting salaries even though their resumes were identical. While you might think that all the hiring professors were men, guess what; some were women and they were just as likely to be biased toward male candidates (Moss-Racusin et al. 2012). This suggests that it is not just men who stereotype and discriminate against women but women too. Please reflect on horizontal segregation in Thought Box 3.11.

**Thought Box 3.11 Horizontal segregation**

Think for a moment about the messages that you received about the kinds of careers you could pursue. What do you believe you can or can’t do because of what you learned in relation to your gender? What about your parents or caregivers – did they pursue life goals that were consistent with their genders? Why or why not?

In addition to horizontal segregation, which finds men and women in particular industries, vertical segregation can be said to occur when higher concentrations of men are found in more highly-paid, high-level positions while higher concentrations of women are found in lower-paid, lower-level positions (Johns 2013; Reskin 1993). Vertical segregation is metaphorically referred to as “the glass ceiling”, which is considered an invisible barrier standing between women and higher levels positions (Reskin 1993; Johns 2013). Often people think that we have overcome the glass ceiling because we now have women in high political offices and as the CEO’s of large companies. We also have female judges, lawyers and doctors, so what is the problem? The problem is that women are not represented in percentages that represent their make-up of the general population (50%). So anytime there is representation of women at less than 50%, this would suggest evidence of discrimination occurring. For example, a study by the European Commission (2013) found that women make up only about 20% of board members of the largest publicly listed EU companies and only 3.3% of these companies have a woman as Chief Executive Officer (CEO).
In politics, some countries have a very low representation of women. For example, just 10% of senior ministers in Hungary are women (European Commission 2013). In the United States while women earn approximately 60% of all master’s degrees, they make up “only 25% of executive- and senior-level officials and managers, hold only 19% of board seats, and make up only 4.6% of CEOs” (Warner 2015). Even in academia—where unbiased merit-based promotion decisions are expected—there is evidence of women being discriminated against with female colleagues constituting “only 30% of full professors and 26% of college presidents” (ibid.).

Reflect for a moment on the problem of vertical segregation in Thought Box 3.12.

**Thought Box 3.12 Vertical segregation**

Vertical segregation is a persistent problem even in female dominated fields. A study by Janzen and colleagues (2013), for instance, found that in the pharmacy sector where 59.2% of licensed pharmacists are women, the majority tend to work in lower-level, lower-paid pharmacy positions whereas male pharmacists tend to be in senior roles or own their own pharmacies. Why do you think that is? Is it solely based on discrimination? Do you aspire to higher level positions? Why or why not? How do your views relate to your gender?

Thought Box 3.12 on vertical segregation, asked you to reflect upon how the differences in employment statistics might be based on more than just discrimination in the hiring process. What about women’s choices, for example? Women choose not to study subjects like engineering and so do not pursue careers in that area, right? Don’t most women like to work part-time to allow them the flexibility to be at home more? These are valid questions and—while there are no easy answers,—part of the reason for these “choices” are because of the ways in which men and women are socialized into gender roles as well as the ways in which they are treated at work.

It is true to an extent that women choose different kinds of careers to pursue and they pursue them in different ways (e.g. part-time, full-time). The development of individual identity and our socialization into gender roles has a lot to do with these decisions. As discussed in Chap. 2, early on children distinguish between boys and girls and begin associating themselves with particular gender roles (Martin et al. 1990). While there has been a reduction in the gendered nature of childrearing with more gender-neutral parenting practices gaining popularity in some countries (e.g., Martin 2005), studies suggest that parents still treat boys and girls differently based upon their gender (Leaper 2000). Additionally, parents serve as role models and display certain gender specific values, attitudes and behaviors which are what children learn are appropriate for their gender (Leaper 2000). Gender roles are then reinforced through societal influences (Martin et al. 1990). For instance, a study of
award-winning children’s books found that there were nearly two times as many male as female main characters (Hamilton et al. 2006). Further, female main characters were more nurturing than male main characters and occupations were stereotyped based upon gender with women more than men appearing not to be in paid employment (Hamilton et al. 2006)!

The influence of society on gender roles has a major influence on women’s career choices and trajectories. First, women tend to develop individual characteristics such as attitudes towards employment and values that differ from those of men (Corcoran and Courant 1987). A study by the Institute of Leadership and Management found that female managers have lower ambitions and expectations in regard to their careers (Institute of Leadership and Management 2011). Women were also found to possess lower levels of self-confidence and self-belief and consequently made more cautious career choices. They were also found to be less sure of themselves in terms on their career paths in comparison to men. Other studies show similar findings. For example, a 2006 report on the careers of health care executives found that just 40% of women compared to 70% of men aspired to CEO positions (American College of Healthcare Executives 2006).

While socialization into particular gender roles impacts the characteristics of women, it can also impact their aspirations. If girls are routinely encouraged by parents to be gentle and kind, told by their teachers they are not good at math and science, and encouraged by society in general to look pretty and be docile than they will begin to see themselves in those terms and will strive to live up to those expectations. Demonstrated by a classic study decades ago (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968) and by many subsequent studies, these phenomena are well-known in social psychology as the self-fulfilling prophecy. What we know through such studies is that society impacts the aspirations of children by giving them ideas about what they can and cannot do—and so girls tend to follow what are considered to be more feminine pursuits and careers, a phenomena referred to by some as the “glass slipper” (Rudman and Heppen 2003), while boys often follow what are considered to be more masculine pursuits and careers. For a recent examination of the gendered nature of society and the methods that are employed to help women to overcome the challenges outlined above, see Lantz-Deaton et al. (2018).

Although we have focused upon sexism directed at women, as we have alluded to, sexism can also impact men. While girls are often encouraged to pursue more feminine activities and to develop feminine qualities, boys are often encouraged to pursue more masculine activities and to “act like a man”. “Boys don’t cry”, “man-up”, and other phrases come to mind. The way in which boys are raised in societies is consistent with general stereotypes of men. A 16-nation survey found that people believe men are aggressive and predatory and not as warm and kind as women (Glick et al. 2004). Not only do such stereotypes depict men as hostile and dominant, which is certainly not true of many men, but stereotypes like these suggest that men must play certain roles within societies. They must be leaders and bread winners and cannot show feelings. This is unfortunate for men many of whom may wish to pursue careers that are historically thought to be for women such as teacher or nurse. Further, it can stigmatize fathers who for whatever reason decide they wish to stay
home and raise children while their wives work! Men should be able to have the same choices available to women, but societal norms typically frown upon this. Reflect on your experience with these ideas before moving on in Thought Box 3.13.

Thought Box 3.13 Gender roles

| What did you learn about gender roles from your parents, teachers, friends, and the wider society? | Do you think it has influenced your academic, career and family choices? Why or why not? |

While socialization into gender roles has an impact on career choices, so do the work environments and home lives in which men and women find themselves. Although more women are taking up higher level positions and jobs in fields that have been traditionally dominated by men, research has found that often women leave their jobs before attaining higher level positions. This is referred to as the metaphorical *leaky pipeline* in science, technology, engineering, and mathematical fields (Blickenstaff 2005). Research has explored the reasons why this happens. One study of 2500 people in science, engineering, and technology found that women who decided to leave their jobs reported that they did so because they felt isolated (often being the only woman in their work group) or because they had experienced sexual harassment (Hewlitt et al. 2008), while other studies found that women reported leaving because they were paid less than men for the same work or had working conditions that did not allow them to balance home and personal obligations (Hewlitt et al. 2008). This last bit of evidence points us to research which suggests that, although traditional gender roles are evolving in many countries, women even in more advanced countries still take on the bulk of responsibility when it comes to home and family. For instance, a study of Harvard graduates (Ely et al. 2014) found that about 60% of men surveyed expected that they would not be primary caregivers of their children. Those expectations were exceeded with 86% not taking the role of primary caregiver. The exact opposite was true for women. About 50% of women expected to be the primary caregivers of their children but in reality, about 70% did so.
For men, socialization into male gender roles can also be limiting. Studies suggest that the way men and women define success and their core values in their lives and careers are similar even for highly educated and ambitious people (a happy family, achieving work-life balance, and having positive relationships) (Ely et al., 2014). Thus, men want what women want, but their desires conflict with societal norms suggesting that they must go out and work long hours to support their families. That said, this is beginning to change. For instance, while the number of dads that stay home with the children are still in a minority, the number is slowly increasing (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Smith 2008). As well, legislation is beginning to change. Sweden is one of the most progressive countries having introduced the first gender-indifferent parental leave in 1974 (Kelly 2016). Shared leave is designed to encourage fathers as well as same sex parents to share leave after a child is born. The rates at which such leave is used varies across different countries where it has been introduced, due, in part, to societal gender norms and organizational pressures for men to show commitment to work. In the UK, for example, it has been suggested that just 2% of fathers make use of paternity leave (Rice-Oxley 2018). However, some counties like Sweden have introduced regulations that require leave to be shared by both parents or forfeited (Kelly 2016). Take a moment to reflect further on shared parental leave in the Thought Box 3.14.

**Thought Box 3.14 Shared parental leave**

If you have a few minutes, find out what the laws are on shared parental leave in your country. Whatever they are, do you think that society supports fathers taking time off when their children are born? Why or why not? How are same-sex parents protected by parental leave laws?

The introduction of paternity leave is just one of many important steps in trying to address the inequalities seen in workplaces around the world. However, as we see, it is not a panacea. While regulations may be put in place to change practice, social engineering only goes so far and cannot change the gendered nature of societies overnight. Stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination related to men and women in the workforce continues. However, being aware of, and willing to address, such issues, is important and highly related to the development of IC because they relate to overcoming prejudice and discrimination in the workplace and the promotion of fairness—topics which we will be explored to a greater extent in later chapters.
Racism

Racism is prejudice and discrimination based upon a person’s race or ethnicity. It refers to the widespread use of individual and institutional power to control groups of people by either granting or withholding rights, respect, representation, and resources (Syed and Ozbilgin 2015). It is again one of the most frequently researched and discussed areas in relation to discrimination. Race is viewed as relating to the visible appearance of someone (Sue et al. 1992), while ethnicity refers to a shared culture potentially involving spirituality, values, languages and beliefs (Balcazar et al. 2010). As alluded to earlier, some places in the world have shown a massive decline in racist attitudes. For example, one study (Dovidio et al. 1996) showed a significant decline in white participants’ views of black Americans as lazy, dropping from nearly 80% in 1933 to less than 20% in 1993. While some studies show a decline of such stereotypes, others suggest less positive evidence. For instance, a study by Devine and Elliot (1995) found that 45% of white participants believed black Americans to be lazy.

While there is some conflicting data from different studies, overall, we have seen stereotypes changing and declining although they have not been completely eliminated. As discussed above, explicit prejudice (derogatory stereotypes, calling people names, abuse, persecution, discrimination) is not as accepted in many societies today as it once was, and is in fact illegal in many places. While we have seen a decline in explicit prejudice, overall, and racism, in particular, researchers suggest that racism exists, but is just more implicit or hidden. New terms such as aversive racism (Gaertner and Dovidio 1986), symbolic racism (Kinder and Sears 1981) and modern racism (McConahay 1986) have cropped up to try to describe the current state of racism. Although there are differences between these terms, they all highlight a conflict between modern egalitarian values (common in some though not all countries). These suggest that we are all equal and should be treated with respect and in non-discriminatory ways; however they exist alongside the emotional aversion towards racial groups that many people still harbor (for overviews see Brewer and Miller 1996; Brown 1995). These more subtle forms of racism reflect how people deal with this conflict between egalitarian values and their underlying negativity towards race. This can manifest itself in the denial that there is a problem, denial of racial privilege and disadvantage and the leading of separate lives. Before looking at the evidence, take a minute to reflect on racism in the next Thought Box 3.15.

Thought Box 3.15 Declining racism?

Do you think racism is declining in your city or country? Why or why not? Do you think it can ever be eliminated?
Evidence for the continuation of racial discrimination is plentiful. Sometimes, it is overt, for example, the existence of right-wing groups which openly condemn other groups. Sometimes, it is more subtle. Unemployment rates are often cited as evidence of racial discrimination. As research has demonstrated, minorities can be screened out of the hiring process early on, when hiring managers notice indicators of race on resumes (e.g., Gerdeman 2017). In terms of unemployment statistics, for example, while 4% of UK white people are unemployed, 7% of other ethnic minorities are unemployed, and 9% of black people are unemployed (Gov.uk 2019b). Disparities are also seen through lower rates of pay for ethnic minority group members. In South Africa where close to 80% of the population is black, in 2011, the average monthly earnings for white people was four times more than for black people. Moreover, black people make up only 17% of business owners (Moloi 2013).

Other statistics often cited in relation to racism have to do with criminal activity. For example, studies show that a disproportionately large percentage of black Americans are arrested and convicted on drug charges each year (Blow 2011). A study in Seattle in the state of Washington provides a case in point. Although the population of Seattle is 70% white and comprises the majority of people who use or sell drugs in Seattle, nearly 66% of individuals arrested are black. Statistically this makes no sense. If only 30% of people who sell drugs are black, then they should make up only 30% of people who are arrested for selling drugs. So, what is wrong here? Researchers suggest that white drug crime is over-looked and that the work of the police department in terms of drug enforcement reflects racial discrimination (Beckett et al. 2006).

Such racial discrimination in the US criminal justice system occurs at all levels. For example, innocent black people are convicted of murder charges seven times more often than innocent white people, and about 50% of black American prisoners convicted of murder are 50% more likely to be innocent than other convicted murderers (Gross et al. 2017). While such statistics indicate the continuation of prejudice, the scores of deaths of black American citizens at the hands of US police officers are also widely thought to be indicators of racism. For example, a recent case drawing world-wide attention relates to the tragic death of 46-year-old George Floyd, a black American killed by police in May 2020 in Minneapolis (Minnesota) (BBC 2020a, McBride 2020, D’Amore 2020, Madani et al. 2020) (see Box 3.1).

Box 3.1 “I can’t breathe”

In May of 2020, four Minnesota police officers apprehended George Floyd for allegedly using counterfeit money to make a purchase in a shop (BBC 2020a). A film taken by one of the witnesses shows arresting officer, Derek Chauvin, pushing the unarmed Floyd to the ground and kneeling on his neck for close to nine minutes as he struggled to breath and pleaded for help (McBride 2020; D’Amore 2020). He was later pronounced dead at a local hospital with the cause of death listed as homicide. Despite the turn of events, the officers responsible for Floyd’s death were not immediately arrested. After protests
erupted across the country demanding justice for Floyd, Chauvin was finally arrested and charged five days later (Madani et al. 2020). A lawyer for the case has suggested that a “pandemic of racism” led to his death (BBC 2020a).

While the Floyd case has drawn outrage and protests have erupted across the world, cases such as these are not new (BBC 2020b) but are symptomatic of systemic racism that occurs across societies. Such cases led to the creation of an organization known as the Black Lives Matter movement (BBC 2020b). The protests and this movement have created controversy. Please take a minute to reflect on this controversy in Thought Box 3.16.

**Thought Box 3.16 Black lives matter**

Unarmed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot by a self-appointed neighborhood watchman in 2012 in a gated community in Florida (US) where he was visiting his father (Ramaswamy 2017). The Black Lives Matter movement (https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/) began in 2013 after Trayvon’s killer was acquitted as an attempt to address racism against black people. Some people object to the name of the organization which focuses only upon black people suggesting that rather than “Black Lives Matter” it should be “All Lives Matter”. Why might people advocate for this change of phrase? Do you agree? Why or why not?

If you struggled with how to answer Thought Box 3.16, you are not alone. Of course, all lives matter; and many people think this is the phrase that should be used instead of “Black lives matter” so that everyone is included. However, the problem is that focusing upon all lives diminishes the message—which is the fact that racism is embedded within societies and that because of it, black people are discriminated against and often killed just because they are black. “Black Lives Matter” highlights racism against black people. It does not suggest that the lives of non-black people do not matter, only that black lives are negatively impacted or in some cases ended because of prejudiced and racist attitudes. It is a call to end racism and violence against the black community.

In addition to movements such as Black lives matter, murder cases such as the ones mentioned above have spurred further research exploring racial prejudice and discrimination. For example, exploring how racial prejudice impacts the performance of police in stressful situations, Correll et al. (2002) re-created situations in the lab, in which white participants saw videos of young men (half black and half white) in realistic settings. One-half of each were holding a gun while the others were holding mobile phones, wallets, or cameras. Participants were asked to press a button “to
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Shoot” if the man had a gun and a button “not to shoot” if he did not. They had one second to make up their minds. The findings of their study revealed that white participants were especially likely to shoot a black man whether he was holding a gun or a phone, camera or wallet. Such evidence suggests that people act on their prejudices and discriminate in only a matter of split seconds which can have grave consequences. Not only does this help to explain police brutality towards citizens with particular characteristics, it helps to suggest what might be done to prevent it.

Other “-isms”

Thus far, we have focused upon racism and sexism, however, prejudice impacts people with a wide variety of other characteristics. Take religion, for example. One study found that employers were much more likely to call in Christian applicants for an interview (17%) in comparison to Muslim applicants (2.3%) (Acquisti and Fong 2014). Discrimination against gay, lesbian, and transgender people is still a massive issue around the world. One study conducted by the Swedish Ministry of Labour found that 28% of gay, lesbian and bisexual people felt they had suffered discrimination at work related to their sexual orientation (Kirton and Greene 2010). There are many types of “-isms” which are sometimes specific to certain societies. For instance, in the United States there is significant distrust of atheists. A Gallup poll found that US voters were more likely to vote for a presidential candidate who is black (96%), a woman (95%), a Catholic (94%), Hispanic (92%), Jewish (91%), Mormon (80%) gay or lesbian (68%) than for an atheist (64%) (J. Jones 2012). Reflect on your views around another type of discrimination in the next Thought Box 3.17.

Thought Box 3.17 Weight discrimination

Although not as widely discussed or researched as other characteristics, discrimination based upon body weight is also a problem. Stereotypes regarding people who are overweight include characteristics such as lazy, socially inept and unintelligent (Puhl and Brownell 2001). Children who are overweight are routinely verbally and physically abused and bullied while adults who are overweight are often denied employment, given lower wages, refused job promotions and deprived of health care (Puhl et al. 2008). What is your experience of weight discrimination? Have you or has someone you know been the target of weight discrimination? Or have you thought about or treated other people differently because of their weight?
It is worth pointing out that often people think that workplace discrimination is one-dimensional. In other words that someone is discriminated against based only upon gender or only upon ethnicity, or only upon sexual orientation. However, discrimination can be multidimensional for those that have multiple characteristics which put them at risk of being discriminated against. For example, black women can suffer discrimination both from being female and being black. An older homosexual man can be discriminated against because of his sexual orientation and his age. Thus, certain groups of people can have even lower representation in the workforce because of multiple characteristics. This is known as intersectionality, or multiple discrimination (Crenshaw 1989). For example, in the UK—despite the presence of thousands of black women in the UK—there are only a total of twenty-five female black professors (Rollock 2019).

We have been discussing stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination and the ways in which they impact upon people in different groups. Studies such as those outlined above suggest that these phenomena can be present and influence people’s actions even if they do not realize it and can have serious consequences for those involved. We are all subject to stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination and, likewise, we are all potential perpetrators. Of course, stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination impact the career prospects of those from different groups, but they also impact the ways in which people carry out their public service jobs like health care and policing and the ways in which they live and interact with others in the world. Thus, they are critical to consider in our quest to become more interculturally competent.

We have tried to carefully outline stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination for you. Further we have addressed why we all have a tendency to stereotype people. As we discussed, stereotyping saves mental energy and it allows us to make assumptions about people (although they are often inaccurate). Stereotypes are perpetuated by society in various ways so that we cannot help but hold stereotypes to some extent. However, what about prejudice? How do prejudices form? And what about discrimination? Why do we discriminate against people who are not like us? More importantly, is there something we can do to avoid prejudice and discrimination? If so what? We now turn to consider these questions.

**Prejudices: Why Do We Develop Them?**

As we hope you have gleaned from the above text, prejudice is a major topic of concern in the quest for intercultural competence because it comprises a major block to understanding others and developing relationships with people who are different from ourselves. Why is it that we often seem to feel negative towards people who are different? While there is no single explanation, this section highlights two theories widely accepted in the field of social psychology which help to provide some explanations. But, before we discuss them, we would like to encourage you to take a minute to ponder this question yourself in the next Thought Box 3.18.
Thought Box 3.18 Can we stop discriminating?

Why do you think that people hold prejudices and discriminate against others? Is it inevitable or is it something that can be changed?

Conformity to Norms

Prior to the 1950s legalized racial segregation was the norm in the United States. White people were thought to be better than black people and racial separation was the order of the day. Children went to separate schools according to whether they were black or white. Water fountains were labelled for whites or blacks. Black people had to sit at the back of city buses or stand and make room if a white person got on a bus. Segregation was standard operating procedure. Seventy years later, we find that not only has segregation been illegal for decades, but the US successfully elected a black president. The changes that have evolved in American society in relation to race relations demonstrate the power of norms, or beliefs held by a society regarding what is correct, acceptable, and permitted (Lapinski and Rimal 2006).

As discussed in Chap. 2, every society or group that we belong to has norms or ways that people are typically expected to behave. If you grew up in an area where stereotypes were perpetuated, then you would tend to think that your stereotypes were true and a normal part of daily life. For example, if you grew up in an area where most women stayed at home to look after children and most Hispanic immigrants had menial jobs, then you would tend to think that those things were normal everywhere. Similarly, if you grew up in an area where exhibiting prejudices and discriminating against others, was normal then again you would think that was normal. Taking these stereotypical views of what is considered normal with you to a job later in life, can influence you leading you to hold prejudices and discriminate according to the social norms (Sherif 1936) you have learned. For instance, you might discriminate against women and Hispanic people who apply for jobs at your organization because in the back of your mind you think women should stay home and Hispanic people should work in menial jobs. These norms will simply be absorbed by you and do not have to be explicitly taught.

As we have seen, norms can evolve, and they are evolving at different rates and in different ways around the world. For example, from 1996 the Defense of Marriage Act defined marriage in the US as being lawful only between men and women. In 2013, this Act was ruled as unconstitutional and as of 2014 more than half of US citizens were in favor of same-sex marriage. Looking at the age ranges of those who
support gay marriage, as you might expect, 70% of younger people in the US support it while only 39% of those over 55 support it (Newport 2011), suggesting that older people grew up with different norms compared to younger people.

While in the case of the US there has been a huge shift in social norms around gay and lesbian relationships, the same is not true in all countries. For instance, while same sex marriage was legalized in Great Britain five years ago, Brunei has recently enacted laws condoning the stoning of gay and lesbian people (Tan 2019). Thus, in Brunei it appears that social norms dictate not only looking down upon homosexuality but treating people in ways that in many countries in the world would be considered completely unacceptable. Take a moment to reflect on the social norms you are familiar with in Thought Box 3.19.

**Thought Box 3.19 Social norms**

Thinking back on your childhood, to what extent were prejudice and discrimination in relation to particular groups considered normal? To what extent did you internalize these social norms? Or is what you believe different from those people you grew up with?

Societal norms are important in understanding the perpetuation of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, however, they can be overcome. At times, people decide not to conform to social norms which is, of course, how societal norms change. Women in many countries used to be the property of men and could not hold jobs, vote or own property. Fortunately, some non-conformists decided that this was unacceptable and through many years of protests and campaigns slowly this has changed with women being increasingly equal to men in many countries. Deciding not to conform to social norms is a challenge since friends, family, and society might ostracize you. It is certainly easier to go along with what others are saying and doing rather than stand up for change. Standing up to those who make racist or sexist comments or who discriminate against others might make you unpopular, but it can also make you an agent of change. Contemplate this idea in Thought Box 3.20.

**Thought Box 3.20 Changing the norm**

Have you ever heard a racist or sexist remark or seen someone being treated unfairly because of their group membership? If so, what did you do? What would it take for you to challenge such a behavior?
While social norms can influence our ways of thinking about and behaving towards people from other groups, it does not mean that they must be accepted. Recognizing where our stereotypes and prejudices come from can help us to control them, but it can also help us to lead to social change.

Social Identity Theory

Social norms are powerful forces and provide part of the explanation for why stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination still occur today. However, norms provide only a partial explanation. We must dig deeper into understanding intergroup relationships in order to understand why there is a tendency to treat people who differ from us less favorably.

Social identity theory outlines the way in which all people develop this sense of themselves, called a self-concept, in part from their membership in social groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). As we grow, we categorize people into groups: girls and boys, blacks and whites, jocks and nerds, etc. The separation of individuals into groups as we have discussed is a normal part of the human experience with classifications ranging from the micro level (e.g., family, friends) to the macro level (e.g., religion, nationality) (Brewer 2003). The groups that you identify yourself as a part of are called ingroups. These are groups with which you share similarities. We like sharing similarities with people because it allows us to develop a sense of identity, self-esteem, belonging and security. We tend to like ingroup members because we share with them certain values, beliefs and behaviors and we know what to expect from them (Brewer 2003).

Let’s say, for example, you like competitive swimming and you are on a swim team. When you meet up with your team members at practice, you’re likely to talk about topics such as your latest breaststroke record, maybe the Olympic swimming competition on television the other night, or an injury that you had recently that has been slowing you down. Belonging to this group gives you a sense of identity: “I am a swimmer.” Being part of this group gives you a sense of self-esteem and belonging: “I feel good about myself because I am a swimmer and swimming is great; I’ve made lots of good friends on the team and I like being part of the group!” Belonging to this group gives you a sense of security: “I like going to swim team. I know what to expect. It’s easy and fun to be around fellow swimmers”. Of course, there are a multitude of such groups we can belong to. Instead of swim team you might be involved in groups related to football, running, choir, band, book club, kite flying, a religious community or a community service group. It is worth noting that ingroups, whilst they serve a variety of purposes in terms of identity, do not always form around positive themes. Criminal gangs, illegal drug users and terrorist groups can also be considered ingroups, to be sure, but ingroups that have formed around more negative activities that people continue to participate in because they are ingroups. Reflect on one of your ingroups in Thought Box 3.21.
Thought Box 3.21 Ingroups

Think about one of your ingroups. How do you feel when you are around your ingroup members? Would you be more apt to help someone from your ingroup as opposed to a stranger you have just met? If so, why do you think that is?

While we have ingroups, we also have outgroups. Outgroups are groups of people to which we do not belong. Putting people into ingroups and outgroups is inevitable (Brewer 2007). As we discussed before, babies begin to form ingroups at just three months old by preferring faces of their own race (Cikara and Van Bavel 2014). Thus, even children raised by parents who value equality and diversity, if they are exposed primarily to people from their own group, they will tend to prefer people from their own group. This is called ingroup preference and has been demonstrated by a variety of studies. Research has found, for instance that hearing ingroup members with similar accents speak generates positive feelings as opposed to listening to outgroup members and that this is linked to our brain chemistry (Bestelmeyer et al. 2014). Individuals have also been shown to act more cooperatively towards those in their ingroups. This ingroup preference or liking for our ingroups extends beyond the ethnic and national groups with, for example, individuals in arbitrarily created laboratory groups having shown group preferences (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Experiments have also found that we have unconscious positive reactions when we hear terms such as ‘we’ and ‘us’ (Perdue et al. 1990).

While ingroups make us feel good, the problem with them is that they often lead to an “us” and “them” mentality. That is having an ingroup makes us feel not so positive about people who are in outgroups. Often, we find outgroup members difficult to interact with especially as the cultural distance (see Chap. 4) grows and we are more unfamiliar with the norms of that group and unsure how to react to them. Language differences as well as cultural differences can also impact interactions. When people do not share the same first language, this can compound difficulty in interacting, when not only are cultural norms different, but individuals have trouble understanding the spoken language of one another.

The linguistic and cultural differences outlined above can easily leave us feeling confused, uncomfortable, and/or tired. Interacting with outgroup members places additional demands on our cognitive resources which can lead us to feel tired and irritable and cause us to direct attention to negative rather than positive aspects of the interactions thus leading us to evaluate the interactions more negatively (Stephan and Stephan, 1985). Further, negative mood states can cause reliance on superficial information like stereotypes, so that individuals are categorized according to
stereotypes instead of viewed and understood as individuals. Stereotyping, as we have discussed, is a problem because it prevents us from understanding people as individuals and leads to making mistakes in understanding them (Försterling 2001). It can also lead to the formation of prejudices (Stangor 2009), which can be the foundation for discrimination. Please take a moment to reflect on one of your outgroups in Thought Box 3.22.

**Thought Box 3.22 Outgroups**

Think about one of your outgroups. How do you feel when you are around members of this outgroup? Is it more of an effort or more uncomfortable than when you are around ingroup members? Why or why not?

The tendency to be more uncomfortable when around outgroup members can lead us to treat outgroup members less favorably than ingroup members—we may even try to avoid them. However, we also tend to treat outgroup members less favorably because it helps us to build our own self-esteem. According to social identity theory, ingroups aim to achieve *positive distinctiveness* (Turner 1975), and in doing so, are prone to making comparisons between the ingroup and the outgroup with the view to seeing themselves as better than the outgroup on things they particularly value. This is one reason why there is a tendency to denigrate outgroups, in order to see the ingroup as superior.

A key psychological term *ethnocentrism* was coined by the work of Sumner back in 1906 and is defined as the belief that one’s own group is superior to all others. This view that our own group is best leads us to feel superior in order to enhance our self-esteem and belonging. Thus, not only do we prefer ingroup members because we feel more comfortable around them, but because they bolster our sense of self. When our sports team wins against another, we celebrate. When we see our country’s flag, we often feel a sense of pride. When we wear our school colors along with everyone else, we feel a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, this tendency to think that our ingroup is best leads to the view of outgroups as being “less than” in various ways and fosters that “us” and “them” mentality. Take a moment to think about what it would take for you to breakdown a division with one of your outgroups (see Thought Box 3.23).
Thought Box 3.23 Outgroup acceptance

Think of one of your outgroups. How likely would you be to sit down next to someone from this outgroup in class? How likely would you be to become friends with an outgroup member? Would you consider marrying someone from this outgroup? Why or why not?

Power and Privilege

Ethnocentrism can lead you to feel that your ingroup is better than any outgroup. Thus, you may develop prejudices regarding outgroups. Once prejudices form, it is easy to think that your ingroup is superior and perhaps deserves wealth, status, and power. Power, a concept widely found in social justice literature (e.g., Adams et al. 2016), is defined as having access to resources that enhance your chances of getting what you need to lead a happy, safe, productive life. Take for example, getting a job after university. Let’s say, for instance, that you are in your last year of university and you are trying to prepare for a career in finance. Your mom works at a finance company and she helps you to get a paid internship at her company. It is a highly sought after and competitive internship but because she has connections, she can get you the internship. You take up the internship and complete it. When you graduate, you are then offered a job by her company which you happily accept. Power in this case is defined by your ability to use your social connections to reach your career goal. It’s good for you, of course, but what about all those students who wanted that finance internship but didn’t have good connections and didn’t really stand a chance?

Power tends to be held by those who closely approximate the majority within societies (Johnson 2017). In countries such as the US, this tends to be people who are white, male, heterosexual, well off, adult, non-disabled and Christian. Depending upon the country you live in, the race/ethnicity and religion of the dominant majority may vary, but the other characteristics are likely to be consistent across societies.

Often, we assume that hiring and promotion decisions are based on merit or how hard someone works, but this masks power relationships. This is not to say that everyone gets jobs because of their connections; only that power certainly makes it easier for some people to be successful compared to others. Power results in the unequal distribution of rewards such as starting salary, travel funds, time off and training. Women and people from ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in
many segments of employment as previously discussed in part because of power imbalances.

Power facilitates privilege, which is considered to be unearned access to resources which are only available to some people due to their advantaged social group membership or an invisible collection of unearned assets (Twine and Gardener 2013). The privileges you receive because of your connections can have a direct impact on your career prospects and life chances (McGee 2015). So if you are born into a family who can pay for you to have books and a computer at home, who support you in your career goals, send you to fee paying schools, pay for you to go to university and facilitate connections for you to make the transition to a career, you can be said to have some privileges that others do not have. Take a moment to complete the inventory in Box 3.2 and then reflect upon it in Thought Box 3.24.

**Box 3.2 Power and privilege inventory**

Read over the statements below. Put a check mark next to those statements that apply to you.

- I have been made fun of or have been made to feel uncomfortable because of my weight.
- My family has taken holidays outside of my home country.
- I do not often see people of my race or ethnicity as characters on television or in films.
- I have always been able to live somewhere where I felt safe.
- I have sometimes felt hungry because my family did not have enough money for food.
- My family owned the house I grew up in.
- When police are around, I typically feel safe and protected.
- I have never been harassed because of my race, religion, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation.
- At times the religious holidays I observe are not observed by universities or local businesses.
- I can hold hands with or express physical affection with an intimate partner in public without people staring at us or making negative comments.
- I have been told by some people that I cannot pursue certain careers because of my gender or disability.
- My ancestors were forced to come to the country I live in against their will or because they were trying to escape oppression in their home country.
- My parents are paying for my education.
- I have never had to wonder if I did not get a job because of my race or ethnicity.
- I have never been made fun of because of my accent or misunderstood because I can’t speak the dominant language as well as everyone else.
- English is my first language.

*Adapted from Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice (Adams et al. 2016)*
Thought Box 3.24 Power and privilege reflection

Reflect on the statements from Box 3.2 above by considering the following questions.

- What were your reactions to the process of doing the above inventory?
- To what extent did you find yourself to be privileged or disadvantaged?
- Were there any surprises? If so, what were they?
- To what extent does your experience with privilege and disadvantage differ from the experience of people you know?
- Is there a particular characteristic in relation to power and privilege that bothers you? If so, what is it? Why are you sensitive about it?

Adapted from Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice (Adams et al. 2016)

The activities above aimed to facilitate you in thinking more deeply about power and privilege and how it relates to ingroups and outgroups. Often, we do not recognize our own privilege especially if we have little experience with outgroups who have experienced disadvantage. Sometimes we believe that people get what they deserve and if they can’t find a job or if they lose a job it’s because of a lack of individual motivation rather than circumstances—a phenomenon known as blaming the victim.

**Blaming the Victim**

Those who have not experienced discrimination for themselves often have difficulty in understanding what it is like to be treated unfairly by others because of group membership. Members of majority ingroups may feel sorry for people in outgroups who suffer discrimination, but it is hard to really get to grips with what it is like to be judged not on your own merit but based upon your race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender or other group membership. Often empathy is in short supply and those from the majority tend to see it as the fault of the outgroup member if they are in a bad situation.

*Blaming the victim* is a social-psychological concept which suggests that people tend to blame other people or assume that their attributes have led to their victimization in order to see the world as a fair place. In other words, we tend to think
that it is the fault of the victim if they can’t find a job, are overweight, have been raped, or are fleeing from their home country. We blame them rather than considering situational causes. A study by Janoff-Bulman et al. (1985) demonstrates this phenomenon. Researchers gave a group of participants a description of a woman’s behavior towards a man. The group of participants rated her behavior as friendly and appropriate. Then they gave the same description to another group of participants, but additionally they told the participants that the woman was later raped by the man. The participants in the second group rated her behavior as overly flirtatious and suggested that she brought the rape on herself.

How could the two groups possibly rate the exact same behavior differently? The tendency to blame the victim has to do with our need to feel that the world is safe. When bad things happen to others, we might feel sorry for them, but we also feel a sense of relief that it was not us. But we can also feel somewhat worried that the same thing could happen to us. To counteract this fear, we decide that it must have been something the victim did and that the same could not happen to us. Thus, we feel that although something bad happened to them, we’re actually safe (Jones and Aronson 1973). Blaming the victim is a problem because it can perpetuate prejudice by allowing us to point the finger at others and assume that they brought their difficulties on themselves. We might think in terms of blaming entire groups for their characteristics. Jewish people, for example, have been victimized all over the world—applying blaming the victim to this phenomenon would lead us to think that they must have done something to deserve it. Please reflect on the concept of blaming the victim in Thought Box 3.25.

**Thought Box 3.25 Blaming the victim**

Can you think of an example where an individual was blamed for something that was not his or her fault? Perhaps it might be an entire outgroup that was blamed? Are there people who think that people who are unemployed are just lazy or don’t try hard enough? Might there be other explanations for why they are unemployed?

Blaming the victim is highlighted here not just to facilitate understanding of how we perceive people individually but how we perceive outgroups. Outgroups are often blamed for their difficulties; consider immigrants, homeless people and the unemployed.

Understanding the dynamics of intergroup relationships and the role of power and privilege in influencing people’s lives is key to facilitate understanding of the ways in which we perceive others for several reasons. First, we can develop more critical cultural self-awareness and can begin to understand why it is that we favor people from our ingroup and often discriminate against people from our outgroups.
By becoming more self-aware, we have the potential to change. Second, it can help us to develop mindfulness. Part of the problem with prejudice is that it is a mindless, some say knee-jerk, reaction to stereotypes that we hold of others. By becoming more mindful, again we can take more control and have more of an ability to change. Third, it can help us to develop true empathy, so that we can begin to put ourselves in another person’s shoes and better understand where they are coming from. Fourth, it can help us to develop a sense of cultural humility with the recognition that perhaps we do not know it all, there are many experiences that people have that we will never fully understand, and that our ingroups are not so important or so much better than outgroups. Self-awareness, mindfulness, empathy and humility—as you will see in the subsequent chapters—are key components in intercultural competence.

*Realistic Group Conflict Theory and Other Explanations*

The formation of ingroups and outgroups are a core explanation for prejudice from a social psychological standpoint and are particularly relevant to our topic here of developing intercultural competence. However, there are other theories that attempt to explain prejudice and discrimination. A leading theory suggests that prejudices can be caused by limited resources which can lead to conflict between groups. A classic study demonstrating group conflict theory was conducted in 1938 by Dollard. In this study, researchers documented the relationships between the local white community and new German immigrants. When the immigrants first arrived, relations were very cordial. Then, a shortage of jobs created tension leading local people to begin showing hostility towards the immigrants and conflict erupted. When resources are plentiful, it is easier to be generous towards outgroups, but when resources are in short supply, majority groups will often look for a “scape goat”, someone or a group of people to blame for the shortages, which tends to be a minority outgroup even if they have nothing to do with the problem. Take a minute to ponder on your experience with conflict in Thought Box 3.26.

**Thought Box 3.26 Group conflict**

Can you think of a group in your area that is blamed for taking jobs, housing, medical care or other resources? Or maybe it is a group of students who you believe have taken particular resources? Do you think the blame is deserved? Why or why not?

One of the most influential theorists in relation to group conflict theory is Muzafer Sherif. Sherif and colleagues (Sherif and Sherif 1953; Sherif et al. 1955; Sherif 1966)
carried out the now-famous summer camp studies in which twelve-year old boys were invited to participate in alleged summer holiday camps. Boys were randomly assigned to different summer camp groups and then placed in situations designed to create ingroup cohesiveness like hiking and building projects. They were then given a series of tasks that foster competition between the groups like football and tug-of-war where prizes were given. This aroused conflict and tension between the two groups. Boys began to express verbal prejudice towards outgroup members and demonstrated aggressiveness towards them by, for instance, burning their group flag and stealing their property. Boys became so aggressive against one another, that they had to be physically separated by the researchers.

While group conflict theory is important in helping us to understand prejudices, other theories and concepts exist, which also attempt to explain prejudice such as the Authoritarian Personality (Adorno et al. 1950), Right-wing Authoritarianism (Duckitt et al. 2002), Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Sidanius et al. 2001) and Dogmatism and Close-mindedness (Rokeach 1948, 1960). While it is beyond the scope of this book to address all of them, we encourage you to widen your reading to better understand the origins of prejudice, which may help you to recognize and reduce your own prejudices and to enhance the development of intercultural competence. Before we move on to the next topic, please take a moment to reflect on other explanations for prejudice in Thought Box 3.27.

**Thought Box 3.27 Other explanations of prejudice**

As discussed above, there are other theories and concepts which attempt to explain prejudice. Choose one of the terms mentioned above (Authoritarian Personality, Right-wing Authoritarianism, Social Dominance Theory, Dogmatism and Close-mindedness) and reflect on how you think it might help to explain prejudice. If you are feeling curious, we suggest that you look it up to see what more you can learn.

**Reducing Prejudice: *How Do We Do It?***

In this chapter, we have presented more of the negative side of human nature discussing a variety of our foibles in relation to cultural difference. However, as we have highlighted, it is crucial to understand how and why we react as we do in the
presence of cultural difference, so that we can learn to overcome these tendencies and reduce our prejudices. The good news is that there is much we can do to overcome these tendencies and to become more interculturally competent, and it is this topic to which we now turn.

Looking down upon outgroups is a key feature of stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and conflict. Such attitudes can be found across societies and remain entrenched, when there is a shortage of information which might transform negative attitudes into more positive attitudes. Stereotypes and prejudices are often continued because people are socially or physically isolated from one another. For instance, in Northern Ireland, Protestants and Catholics often live and interact separately, which does not help in alleviating the tensions between them (Hewstone et al. 2005). To put it in simple terms, often there is an ongoing shortage of contact with people from different groups. Groups may remain separate because of educational, occupational, cultural and material differences in addition to the worry of what it might be like to be in closer contact (Stephan and Stephan 1985).

Stephan and Stephan (2000) outlined reasons why people feel threatened and anxious around outgroup members. We might feel that our ingroup is threatened and will not survive. We might worry about how the outgroup might influence or change the values, beliefs, morals and norms of our ingroup. We might worry about feeling embarrassed, being rejected, or making mistakes and acting inappropriately. These factors can converge to cause us to avoid interacting with outgroup members and lead us to keep our distance. Reflect upon your own comfort levels with cultural difference in Thought Box 3.28.

**Thought Box 3.28 Making contact**

What if anything, bothers you most about making contact with people from other cultures? How do you deal with this?

While we can see people avoiding one another on an individual basis, we can also observe it on more of a mass scale. Societally, we may see segregation; sometimes voluntary and sometimes involuntary and regulated by the government or organizations, although less often today. There is no shortage of cultural enclaves exemplified, for instance, by China towns, little Italys and other cultural enclaves within countries and cities in which people with a shared background live and sometimes work primarily together. Reflect upon the segregation you see around you in Thought Box 3.29.
Reducing Prejudice: How Do We Do It?

Thought Box 3.29 Segregation

Do you see segregation between cultural groups occurring around you? If so, in what ways? What might be some ways to overcome it?

Using the previous thought box, you may have noted segregation that you see at your college or university, when students from particular cultures might stick together in lecture theatres and around campus. Although segregation may feel more comfortable, it only serves to perpetuate suspicion and stereotypes and therefore prejudice and discrimination. As previously noted, US schools used to be segregated, but were desegregated in 1954 with the view that increased contact between white and black children would improve relationships and help to end prejudice. This view has become known as the contact hypothesis and it has become one of the most influential theories in Social Psychology (Brown 1995), and one of the most widely used psychological interventions for reducing prejudice and improving relationships between people from different cultures (Oskamp and Jones 2000).

Contact theory, typically credited to Allport (1954), generally suggests that contact with those from different cultures tends to reduce prejudice and lead group members to interact in more favorable ways. For example, in 1951, researchers (Deutsch and Collins) studied the attitudes of white Americans towards black Americans in three public housing projects (apartment buildings). One group of white families were randomly assigned to apartments in a building with black families so that black and white families were living alongside one another in the same building. Another group of white and black families were assigned to live in separate buildings. Several months into the study, white families in the integrated building reported a greater positive change in their attitudes towards black families than white families who were in a separate building. Studies like this have multiplied with contact being shown to reduce prejudices for younger people’s attitudes toward the elderly, healthy people’s attitudes toward the mentally ill, nondisabled children’s attitudes toward disabled children, and heterosexual people’s attitudes towards gay men and lesbians among others (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

A recent metanalysis, which evaluated the effectiveness of contact in hundreds of studies over time, found that, overall, contact does work in reducing prejudices (Pettigrew et al. 2011). However, not all contact is successful, and some studies find that contact does not work in reducing prejudice and in some cases can exacerbate it. For example, research into US school desegregation found mixed results. Some studies found that prejudices were reduced, and individuals went on to live and work in situations that were more integrated (Braddock 1985) while others found that individuals re-segregated themselves by mainly interacting with those from their own
ethnic group (Schofield and Sagar 1977). Brewer’s (2003) review of the literature led her to conclude that “the effectiveness of intergroup contact experiences as a method of reducing intergroup prejudice depends on a complex interaction of the structure and quality of the contact experience, the context in which it takes place, and the frequency and extensiveness of contact relationships” (p. 108). This suggests that the process is not exactly simple.

Many college and university campuses today are highly diverse; however, results vary in the extent to which studying on a diverse campus breaks down prejudices and facilitates the development of IC. Some studies find that students who have friends from different ethnic and racial backgrounds tend to reduce their prejudices and feel they have more in common with those from other groups (Van Laar et al. 2008). However, as alluded to earlier, students often self-segregate. While this can be seen in lecture theatres and in student-accommodation, joining student organizations based upon ethnic, racial or national group membership can also be problematic as it can limit contact with those from different cultures but, further, it can lead to a stronger cultural identity. For example, being a member of a fraternity or sorority may lower IC because such memberships have the potential to limit encounters with people from other cultures. However, monocultural minority student organizations have been found to be problematic as well as they can strengthen a sense of ethnic victimization, so that instead of building bridges, divisions can become enhanced. Students in these groups can see themselves as having less in common with those from other groups (Sidanius et al. 2004).

With the controversy of the extent to which contact helps to reduce prejudice, further studies by Allport (1954) and others (Amir 1969) were able to identify conditions under which contact is facilitated and the reduction of prejudice is more likely to occur. Some of the most important conditions include equal status, support from authority figures, intergroup cooperation and pursuit of a subordinate goal (Brown 1995). Intergroup cooperation and focusing on subordinate goals are supported by the summer camp studies by Sherif and colleagues (Sherif and Sherif 1953; Sherif et al. 1955; Sherif 1966). During a later stage of the Sherif’s studies, researchers tried to reduce conflict and improve relationships between the groups of boys participating in the summer camps. To do so, they created a series of situations in which the groups had to cooperate to reach a superordinate goal—a goal that both groups wanted but they could not get without the help of the other group. For instance, one task was to get a broken-down truck started by pushing it—where all boys from both groups were needed to push the truck. The cooperation of the groups in pursuing such goals was found to reduce conflict and prejudice between the groups.

The facilitative conditions, as outlined above suggest how contact can be maximized. We now explore each and consider what might hinder each in the context of contact at university and encourage you to think of ways to help.

- Equal status. Those from different cultural backgrounds should be afforded equal status and power for contact to be most effective. Equal status seems almost an ideal and, perhaps, not easily achieved when there are students from highly diverse backgrounds that come together on university campuses. Minority students may
feel they are not treated equally in comparison to majority students. Students whose first language is different from the dominant language on campus may struggle to feel equal when they do not have as good of a command of the language and can struggle with understanding and expression in addition to difficulty with cultural norms. At times, students may notice other differences such as class and nationality that cause tension. For instance, a domestic student who had to work part-time to support himself and get a loan to pay tuition shared the following experience.

‘Like there are a lot of inequalities between students. Some international students I have a really hard time with. Some don’t speak English well enough to be in our program and I have to explain everything to them and end up doing some of their work when we are together in groups because they can’t speak or write English well enough to do it. It’s also annoying cause some have really a lot of money. They take taxis to get to class two blocks away and have servants attached to them who wash their clothes and clean up after them. Meanwhile not only am I doing their work, I have to work to support myself and I’m going into serious debt.’

When status is unequal between groups, it can have an adverse on effect on interactions especially when stereotypes are confirmed instead of disconfirmed (Pettigrew 1969). Reflect on your experience of student equality in Thought Box 3.30.

**Thought Box 3.30 Student equality**

| To what extent do you feel that students on campus are equal? Unequal? How are some privileged or disadvantaged? Is there anything to be done about inequalities on campus? If so, what? |

- **Support from authority figures.** Social norms are important in facilitating the breakdown of prejudice and the effectiveness of contact (Allport 1954; Amir 1969). If the wider society (governments and organizations) is not supportive of diversity, the effectiveness of contact can be diminished, and tensions exacerbated. In relation to your specific context, colleges and universities vary in their policies in relation to integrating students. They also provide varying levels of support in facilitating relationships between students from different cultures. These things can make the difference, which is why we will ask you in subsequent chapters to consider the extent to which your institution supports internationalization;
equality, diversity, and inclusion initiatives; and the development of intercultural competence in staff and students. Think about this a little more using Thought Box 3.31.

**Thought Box 3.31 Support from authority**

| To what extent does your government support equality? How do you know? To what extent are students of different cultural backgrounds treated equally by staff and university management? Can these things be improved? If so, how? |

- **Common goals and intergroup cooperation.** As we saw in the Sherif’s experiments, common goals can help those from different groups to cooperate and work together to pursue a goal. This has filtered down into practice at some universities with university lecturers being encouraged to create mixed cultural groups to carry out group projects (e.g., Leask 2015). While the intention is good, it can backfire for a variety of reasons. First, students are not always equal as outlined above, which can create tension. Second, students do not always know how to interact effectively across cultures because they lack training or experience. An international student shared this experience of being in a working group with all domestic students (Lantz-Deaton 2014):

  ‘I think everyone else there is British and that is a very permanent group… I think I would prefer if other internationals were in the group because I do feel a little bit left out… It is like when they tell us to gather into or split into pairs or groups of three and discuss, especially if there are groups of three or four, I tend to be on the sides and they don’t actually talk to me. I don’t know why that it is. That’s something I’ve been wondering. Why is it that some people want to talk to you and other people don’t and some people seem to outright ignore you?—international student.’ (Lantz-Deaton 2014)

A third point to make in relation to group work, is that students may also struggle with different norms. For instance, in some countries showing up on time is a given whereas in other countries time is fluid as we discussed in Chap. 2. Fourth, not all students are equally committed to obtaining particular marks. Students who want a high mark can be frustrated when other students in their groups do not take on their share of work to achieve a high mark. Take a moment to reflect on your experiences with group work in Thought Box 3.32.
Thought Box 3.32 Group work

What is your experience (if any) of working in mixed cultural groups? Have you found it has enhanced or diminished your relationship with people from different cultures? What can be done to make working in mixed cultural groups more effective?

We believe that—while the intention to put students in mixed cultural groups makes sense, especially when considered alongside the principles of contact theory,—care needs to be taken on the part of institutions to facilitate students working in mixed cultural groups. Students, of course, also have an important role to play in making mixed cultural group work more effective by understanding the dynamics of interacting across cultures and behaving in interculturally competent ways.

Contact theory is not a panacea easily applied on university and college campuses, but it does provide important suggestions on what we need to think about in relation to reducing prejudice and enhancing intercultural competence. Contact between people from different groups facilitates learning about outgroups and may help to reduce prejudice (Allport 1954) by, for instance, disconfirming stereotypes. Contact can reduce the fear and anxiety related to interacting with those from outgroups which in turn can lead to more positive evaluations of outgroup members (Stephan and Stephan 1985). Contact is hypothesized to increase empathy or one’s ability to take the perspective of outgroup members (Stephan et al. 1999), which—as you know—is important in the development of intercultural competence. A key message for this chapter is not just to become familiar with the definition and explanation of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination but to develop an understanding of the ways in which they might be reduced and the competencies that they suggest as important in developing intercultural competence.

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