What Is Prejudice?

Social psychologists have defined prejudice in a variety of ways, but I will define **prejudice** as a hostile or negative attitude toward a distinguishable group on the basis of generalizations derived from faulty or incomplete information. It contains a cognitive component (a stereotype and set of beliefs about a group), an emotional component (dislike of or active hostility toward the group), and a behavioral component (a predisposition to discriminate against the group). For example, when we say an individual is prejudiced against blacks, we mean he or she believes that, with a few exceptions, all blacks are pretty much the same; dislikes black people; and is disposed to behave with hostility and bias toward them. In his classic book *The Nature of Prejudice,* Gordon Allport described the insidious nature of prejudiced reasoning.

> *Mr. X:* The trouble with the 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 favor 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 night clubs.[5]

This dialogue illustrates the nature of prejudice far better than a mountain of definitions. In effect, the prejudiced Mr. X is saying, "Don't trouble me with facts; my mind is made up." He makes no attempt to dispute the data presented by Mr. Y. He either distorts the facts to make them support his hatred of Jews or he bounces off them, undaunted, to a new area of attack. A deeply prejudiced person is virtually immune to information at variance with his or her

cherished stereotypes. As famed jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., once said, "Trying to educate a bigot is like shining light into the pupil of an eye—it constricts." A great deal of experimental evidence supports Allport's observations, demonstrating that bombarding people with facts that run counter to their prejudices fails to get them to modify those prejudices. Instead, they typically create a new mental subcategory—such as "aggressive female," "honest lawyer," or "well-educated African American"—convincing themselves that what they have learned about the general stereotype may be true but is a rare exception, perhaps even "the exception that proves the rule."[6] Such responses make prejudices hard to eliminate. As I noted in Chapter 4, cognition is conservative; we resist changing our beliefs.

The nature of prejudice leads us to generalize from individuals to the group as a whole. Logically we know that just because all terrorists and suicide bombers in the Middle Eastern conflict are young Muslim males (and, rarely, a few females), it does not follow that all Muslim males are terrorists. But the stereotypical images at the core of prejudice are often so powerful that they overwhelm logical thinking.

It is reasonably safe to assume that all of us have some degree of prejudice, whether it is against an ethnic, national, or racial group, against people with different sexual orientations from ours, against specific areas of the country as places to live, or even against certain kinds of food. Let's take food as an example. In this culture, most people do not eat insects. Suppose Mr. Y were to tell you that caterpillars or earwigs were a great source of protein and, when carefully prepared, extremely tasty. Would you rush home and fry up a batch? Probably not. Like Mr. X, you would probably find some other reason for your prejudice, such as the fact that most insects are ugly. After all, in this culture, we eat only aesthetically beautiful creatures—like lobsters!

Gordon Allport wrote his book in 1954; the dialogue between Mr. X and Mr. Y might seem somewhat dated to the modern reader. Do people really think that way? Is there anyone so simpleminded as to believe that old inaccurate stereotype about Jewish bankers? Some 20 years after Allport's dialogue, a similar statement was made, not by an ordinary citizen but by a man who, at the time, was the single most powerful military officer in the United States. General George

S. Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a public speech referring to "Jewish influence in Congress," said, "it is so strong you wouldn't believe, now . . . they own, you know, the banks in this country, the newspapers. Just look at where the Jewish money is."[7] When the Nixon Watergate tapes were released, we had the dubious privilege of hearing conversations between Richard Nixon and his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, and between Nixon and the Reverend Billy Graham, in which our former president expressed a similar set of erroneous opinions and negative feelings about Jews to his sympathetic listeners. And in 2006, police pulled over the popular actor Mel Gibson for drunk driving. After accusing the arresting officer of being Jewish, Gibson went on an obscenity-laden tirade against Jews, during which he ranted that, "the Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world!"

It's easy to be smug about other people's prejudices, especially if we don't share them; it's harder to see our own. Even scientists, who are trained to be objective and fair-minded, can be influenced by the prevailing prejudices of their times. Louis Agassiz, one of the great American biologists of the nineteenth century, argued that God had created blacks and whites as separate species.[8] In 1925, Karl Pearson, a distinguished British scientist and mathematician, concluded his study of ethnic differences by stating: "Taken on the average and regarding both sexes, this alien Jewish population is somewhat inferior physically and mentally to the native [British] population."[9] And scientists for centuries have claimed that the brains of women were inferior to those of men. In 1879, Gustave Le Bon, a Parisian social scientist, wrote: "In the most intelligent races, as among the Parisians, there are a large number of women whose brains are closer in size to those of gorillas than to the most developed male brains. This inferiority is so obvious that no one can contest it for a moment."[10]

Although the biases in these claims have long since been exposed and debunked,[10, 11] less obvious biases remain and can afflict all of us. Let me offer a personal example involving sexism. In the first edition of this book, while discussing individual differences in persuasibility, I made the point that women seem to be more "persuasible" than men. I was, shall I say, persuaded by an experiment conducted in the late 1950s by Irving Janis and Peter Field,[12] which confirmed my implicit, biased stereotype that men are more likely

than women to evaluate arguments on their merits, whereas women are more gullible. I was unaware of the possible weakness in the Janis and Field experiment until it was called to my attention, gently but firmly, by one of my former students, who pointed out that it was weighted unintentionally against women in much the same way IQ tests were once weighted against rural and ghetto residents. The topics of the persuasive arguments included civil defense, cancer research, the German World War I military leader von Hindenberg, and so on—topics the culture of the 1950s encouraged men to take an interest in while women were encouraged toward more "feminine" matters. I realized that the results may simply have meant that people are more persuasible on topics they aren't curious or knowledgeable about. Indeed, my speculations were confirmed by a subsequent series of experiments by Frank Sistrunk and John McDavid.[13] In their studies, they used a variety of topics, some of typically greater interest to men and others applying more to the interests and expertise of women. Their results showed that although women were more persuasible on the masculine-oriented topics, men were more persuasible on the topics that traditionally have appealed to women. Both sexes, it seems, tend to be gullible about things they don't know or care much about.

In short, when we are reared in a prejudiced society, we often casually accept its prejudices. We don't even look at scientific data critically if they support our biased beliefs and stereotypes about some group.

The Multiple Forms of Prejudice When most people think of prejudice, they imagine overt behavior—like that of the angry policeman at the beginning of this chapter. But prejudice comes in many forms. It can certainly be overt and hostile, but it can also be barely perceptible. It can be conscious and intentional or unconscious and unintentional. And it can fall somewhere in between these extremes. For example Ian Ayers[14] discovered measurable levels of bias when he sent black and white car shoppers to 90 automobile dealerships in the Chicago area in the early 1990s. Using a carefully rehearsed, uniform strategy to negotiate the lowest possible price on a car (a car that cost the dealer approximately $11,000), they found evidence of bias against African Americans—and against women. White males were given a final price that averaged $11,362; white

females, $11,504; African American males, $11,783; and African American females, $12,237. But was the bias hostile, conscious, and intentional? We cannot be sure.

In 2003, the sociologist Devah Pager[15] sent pairs of well-groomed, well-spoken college graduates with identical resumes to visit more than 350 employers advertising entry-level job openings in the Milwaukee area. Half the applicants were white; half were African American. Within each group, half indicated on their job application that they had served 18 months in prison for cocaine possession. The question was this: Who would be called back for an interview? Employers clearly preferred the white applicants. Those with a clean record were called three times as often as the blacks with a clean record. Among the ex-convicts, the employers called back the whites twice as often as the blacks. Indeed, the employers even showed a small preference for white convicts over blacks with no criminal record. As with the car dealers, it is not really possible to know whether the employers felt animosity toward the black applicants or whether they were aware of the bias in their judgments. But the bias was there and its cost to the black applicants was considerable.

A more recent set of experiments[16] found that this kind of bias extends to the way we respond to people in distress. White subjects were more likely to respond (and responded more quickly) if a person they witnessed falling down and hurting themselves was white rather than black. This bias was only apparent if the accident was fairly severe and the victim was clearly hurt; there was no bias if the accident was a minor one. Why might this be? Because severe accidents may require more contact and involvement, many white people may find it aversive to get involved, and therefore seek to find a way to avoid prolonged contact. Thus, rather than rushing to the aid of a person in serious need, they appear to spend extra time working to convince themselves the emergency is not so severe, which impedes them from coming to the black victim's aid. In the same set of studies, black subjects did not show this bias; regardless of the victim's race, they were just as helpful and just as quick to respond to the accident. This is an important race difference; whites appear more likely than blacks to be ambivalent to interacting across the racial divide, at least in this kind of helping situation.

In August, 2005, New Orleans was devastated by Hurricane Katrina, the most destructive natural disaster in American history. For several days, residents of the flooded city were left to fend for themselves without access to food, drinking water, or other necessities. Some people, however, managed to find supplies in abandoned grocery stores. Newspapers printed photos of New Orleans residents wading through chest-high water, dragging Hefty bags full of these supplies. But the captions under the photos often characterized their behavior differently depending on their race. Under one photograph, white people were described as "managing to find" vital necessities. Under another photograph, black people who were doing exactly the same thing were described as "looting."

Many investigators, like Thomas Pettigrew and his colleagues,[17] believe that indirect forms of prejudice like those I just described have largely replaced the blatant forms of bigotry that many Americans expressed—and tolerated—in the past. Today, most people probably think of themselves as unprejudiced, and many have genuinely egalitarian views. Still, they may continue to discriminate against minority-group members in nonobvious ways.

For example, in one set of experiments, Carl Word and his associates[18] trained white Princeton students to interview applicants for a job. Huge differences emerged in the way interviewers interacted with black and white applicants: When the applicant was black, the interviewer unwittingly sat slightly farther away, made more speech errors, and terminated the interview 25 percent sooner than when the applicant was white. In short, interviewers were uncomfortable. Do you suppose this had an effect on the performance of the job applicants? Let's take a look. In the second part of the experiment, Word and his colleagues trained their interviewers to treat white students in the same manner that the interviewers had treated either the white applicants or the black applicants in the previous experiment. The experimenters videotaped the students being interviewed. Independent judges rated those who had been treated like the black applicants as being more nervous and less effective than those treated like the white applicants. The results of this experiment are profound. Even in the absence of hostile intentions, predudice can be insidious and consequential.

If you were applying for a job, how would you be treated by your potential employers if they had prior information that you

were gay or lesbian? Would they refuse to hire you? Would they treat you with less warmth than they treated heterosexuals? The answer, at present, is both no and yes. In a field experiment, Michelle Hebl and her colleagues[19] trained 16 college students (eight males and eight females), to apply for jobs at local stores. In some of their interviews, the students indicated that they were gay; in others, they did not. To standardize the interactions, the applicants were all dressed similarly in jeans and pullover jackets and behaved identically whether they were in the "homosexual" or the "heterosexual" role.

The investigators found no evidence of blatant discrimination. The "homosexual" students were allowed to fill out job applications, were allowed to use the employer's private bathroom, and received callbacks with the same frequency as when they were "heterosexual." On the other hand, when the (presumably heterosexual) employers were interviewing students they believed were gay, they were less verbally positive, spent less time interviewing them, used fewer words while chatting with them, and made less eye contact with them. It was clear from their behavior that the potential employers were uncomfortable or more standoffish than they were with people they believed to be heterosexual. Subtle forms of prejudice are also directed toward women. Peter Glick and Susan Fiske[20] make an interesting distinction in their analysis of gender prejudice. They studied 15,000 men and women in 19 nations, and found evidence for two forms of sexism. One is what they call **hostile sexism**, which reflects an active dislike of women. The other is **benevolent sexism**, which appears favorable to women but actually is patronizing. Hostile sexists hold stereotypic views of women that suggest that women are inferior to men (e.g., that they are less intelligent, less competent, and so on). Benevolent sexists hold stereotypically positive views of women (e.g., that they are warmer, kinder, and more nurturing than men), but, according to Glick and Fiske, underneath it all, both kinds of sexists assume that women are the weaker and less competent sex. Benevolent sexists tend to idealize women romantically, may admire them as wonderful cooks and mothers and want to protect them when they do not need protection. Thus, both hostile sexism and benevolent sexism—for different reasons—serve to justify relegating women to traditional roles in society. Benevolent sexism, according to Glick and Fiske, is "a

particularly insidious form of prejudice" because, lacking a tone of hostility toward women, it doesn't seem like a "prejudice" to men—nor to many women, either.

The Justification of Prejudice Because most of us recognize that prejudice is generally frowned upon, we take pains to avoid doing or saying things that would appear biased. But the effort to suppress what we really feel can be mentally taxing. Thus, when our cognitive resources are depleted—if we are tired, angry, stressed, distracted, or inebriated—prejudice may leak out. (Mel Gibson's drunken tirade against Jews is a perfect example.)

Christian Crandall and Amy Eshleman[21] suggest that most people struggle with the conflict between their urge to express prejudice and their need to maintain a positive self-concept (as someone who is not a bigot), both in their own eyes, as well as the eyes of others. However, because supressing prejudice requires energy and we are inclined to conserve mental energy, we may be particularly attracted to information that justifies our prejudice and allows us to express it. Once we find a valid justification for disliking a group, we can express prejudice without feeling like bigots—thus avoiding cognitive dissonance. As Crandall and Eshleman put it, "Justification undoes suppression, it provides cover, and it protects a sense of egalitarianism and a non-prejudiced self-image."

Let us consider some examples. David Frey and Samuel Gaertner[22] examined the helping behavior of whites toward a black individual. In their study, they found that white subjects were just as willing to help a black student as a white student, but only when the person needing help had demonstrated sufficient effort. When white students were led to believe that the student had not worked hard enough at the task, they were more likely to refuse a black student's request for help than a white student's. These findings suggest that racism tends to emerge when it can be easily rationalized: It would be hard to justify refusing to help a minority person whose need for help stemmed from circumstances beyond his or her control, without feeling and looking like a bigot. But when withholding help seems more reasonable—such as when the person asking for help is "lazy"—people can feel freer to express underlying prejudices.

Suppose you dislike gay men and lesbians and are inclined to deny them the same rights that heterosexuals enjoy, but you are sup-

pressing those feelings and actions because you want to preserve your self-image as a fair-minded person. How might you avoid the expenditure of all the energy required to suppress your impulse? As a justification for the expression of anti-gay thoughts and feelings, many people have used the Bible. Through the lens of a particular reading of the Bible, an anti-gay stance can be defended as fighting *for* "family values" rather than *against* gays and lesbians. If you are prejudiced against gays, you can find justification in the Bible to condemn homosexuality so you can continue to see yourself as a good person; but if you are not prejudiced against gays, you can find the Bible's preaching of compassion and love to be justification for accepting homosexuality.

A key factor in justifying our biases is whether we believe an individual has control over his or her situation. For example, despite extremely strong evidence to the contrary, many people continue to believe that homosexuality is a "lifestyle choice" rather than an innate and unchangeable predisposition.[23] Why would people ignore evidence about the biological nature of homosexuality? I would argue that seeing homosexuality as a choice allows them to feel justified in their prejudice, and therefore to feel no qualms about opposing same-sex marriage, equal status in the armed forces, and other legal rights for gays—and all the while maintain an image of themselves as fair-minded. Support for this position comes from research on prejudice against fat people. Obesity is common in America; more than 25 percent of the population could be considered clinically obese. Yet this ubiquity does not seem to have increased tolerance for people who are fat. One reason for this is that people tend to perceive weight as something controllable with diet and exercise. I can feel better about disliking you, if your disagreeable traits are your own fault. After all, it was your decision to eat potato chips instead of vegetables, and your decision to play video games instead of jogging.

In a recent experiment by Eden King and her associates,[24] a woman was sent into stores to interact with salespeople. Half the time, she was made to look obese, by wearing a "fat suit" under her clothing; half the time she was of average, healthy weight. On some of these visits, she was drinking a diet soda; on others, she was drinking a milkshake. When she presented herself as fat but seemed motivated to lose weight (the diet soda), the salespeople treated her just

as nicely as when she was thin. Not so when the milkshake made her obesity look like a choice: Although salespeople did not treat her with blatant hostility, they smiled at her less frequently, made less eye contact with her, and spoke with her in a more abrupt and less friendly manner.

Prejudice can cut both ways. Not only do people discriminate against minority groups but, under some specifiable circumstances, they will discriminate *in favor of* minorities. For example, in a series of clever experiments, Kent Harber[25] had white college students read and evaluate poorly written essays supposedly written by other students enrolled in a writing workshop. Half the evaluators were led to believe that the essay writer was black; the other evaluators thought that the writer was white. Given the nature of stereotypes of blacks as less proficient writers, one might expect that the fictive black writers would receive unduly harsh feedback, but this is not what happened. Instead, the evaluators seemed to bend over backward to say positive things about the subjective content (but not the objective mechanics) of the black writers' essays. In a follow-up experiment, white teacher trainees who were first allowed to express positive attitudes toward minorities subsequently gave feedback to blacks that was as critical as feedback given to whites. However, trainees who were first subtly "pushed" to express negative attitudes toward blacks showed the positive bias strongly.

Let me elaborate on this issue. Despite the fact that we may hold prejudices, if we desire to see ourselves as fair and egalitarian, we may bend over backward when interacting across racial lines to avoid appearing prejudiced—to ourselves and to others. Research by Jennifer Richeson and Nicole Shelton[26] suggests that our efforts to suppress our prejudices can be very taxing. Using subtle measures of prejudice to identify college students who differed in anti-black prejudice, Richeson and Shelton assigned low- and high-prejudice students to interact briefly with either a black or a white confederate. After the conversation, the subjects took a test of cognitive functioning. The results suggested that suppressing prejudicial reactions takes a toll, especially on the high-prejudice subjects; they scored far worse on the cognitive ability test if they interacted with a black confederate than if they interacted with a white confederate. Thus, our desire not to appear prejudiced has clear costs. For the target of prejudice, it can mean not receiving ac-

curate feedback in interracial situations. For the prejudiced individual, it can cause a cognitive burden that literally reduces intelligent thought.

Stereotypes and Their Effects At the core of prejudice is the generalization of characteristics, motives, or behavior to an entire group of people. This kind of generalization, revealed by General Brown, Richard Nixon, and Mel Gibson, is called *stereotyping*. Journalist and political commentator Walter Lippmann, who coined the term, made a distinction between the world "out there" and the stereotype—the little pictures in our heads that help us interpret the world we see. To **stereotype** is to allow those pictures to dominate our thinking, leading us to assign identical characteristics to any person in a group, regardless of the actual variation among members of that group. Thus, to believe that blacks have a natural sense of rhythm, or Jews are materialistic, or women are gullible is to assume that all blacks can dance, or that all Jews go around collecting possessions, or that all women are unable to think critically. We learn to assign characteristics to other groups at a very young age. In one study,[27] fifth-grade and sixth-grade children were asked to rate their classmates in terms of a number of characteristics: popularity, leadership, fairness, and the like. The children of upper-class families were rated more positively than the children of lower-class families on every desirable quality. It seems the youngsters were unable to judge their classmates on an individual basis; instead, they had stereotyped them according to their social class.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, stereotyping is not necessarily an intentional act of abuse; nor is it always negative. Rather, often it is merely a way we humans have of organizing and simplifying the complexities of our social world, and we all do it. Stereotyping is inevitable because our evolutionary ancestors needed to be able to quickly categorize friends versus foes, members of hostile tribes from those of friendly tribes, and so on. So the legacy of our survival is that our brains are wired to categorize people automatically, unconsciously, and immediately along dimensions such as race, age, and sex. Whether we consciously believe these stereotypes when we consider them, express them, or act upon them depends a good deal on our individual characteristics and the situations we are in, but at a very basic level, we are all wired to think stereotypically. Because we

share a common culture, most of us have specific pictures in mind when we hear the words "football player," "computer geek," "college professor," or "high-school cheerleader." To the extent that the stereotype is based on experience and is at all accurate, it can be an adaptive, shorthand way of dealing with complexity.

On the other hand, if the stereotype blinds us to individual differences within a class of people, it is maladaptive and potentially dangerous. Stereotyping can be harmful to the target, even if the stereotype seems to be neutral or even positive. It is not necessarily negative to attribute "ambitiousness" to Jews, "a natural sense of rhythm" to blacks, or an "artistic temperament" to gay men,[28] but it is often unfair and burdensome to be pegged by group stereotypes. Some Asian Americans, for example, complain of being stereotyped as a "model minority," because of the pressures such an unrealistically positive stereotype imposes. Stereotypic generalizations are abusive, if only because they rob the person of the right to be perceived and treated as an individual with his or her own individual traits, whether positive or negative. Furthermore, stereotypes distort the way we interpret people's behavior. Once we have a distorted perception of someone, we may act on these distorted perceptions, treating the individual in a biased way.

For example, in our culture many white people tend to associate black people with images of violent and criminal behavior. My guess is that this is precisely what happened to the people who wrote the captions about the black hurricane victims in New Orleans; their general stereotypes about black people guided their perceptions and suggested "looting" as an appropriate characterization for blacks, but not whites in the same situation. So if we hold such stereotypes and we encounter a black person, our thinking can be tainted by associations that pop into our heads. For example, Birt Duncan[29] showed people a film of a black man and a white man in an argument. At one point in the film, one of the men shoves the other. Duncan found that people interpreted the shove very differently depending on who did the shoving. If the black man shoved the white man, they were more likely to see it as aggression; if the white man shoved the black man, they were more likely to interpret the shove as playful. This bias—seeing the same gesture as more violent when it comes from a black man—showed up even when the people viewing and interpreting the film were themselves black. Because we all belong to the same

culture, we all marinate in a common stew of stereotypic images—thus we are often prone to the same unconscious biases, even those against our own group.

One consequence of stereotyping is that when making judgments about people, we often ignore or give insufficient weight to information that does not fit the stereotype. When convicts come up for parole, for example, parole officers are supposed to consider many factors—such as the seriousness of the crime, the life circumstances of the convict, and good behavior while in prison—because such considerations predict who will return to crime once paroled. Racial and ethnic stereotypes can outweigh such information. Galen Bodenhausen and Robert Wyer[30] asked college students to read fictionalized files of prisoners who were up for parole and to use the information in the files to make a parole decision. Sometimes the crimes "fit" the offenders—for example, when a Latino they called "Carlos Ramirez" committed assault and battery or when an upper-class Anglo-Saxon, "Ashley Chamberlaine," embezzled thousands of dollars. In other instances, the crimes were inconsistent with the stereotypes. When prisoners' crimes were consistent with the students' stereotypes, the students tended to overlook other relevant information—such as good behavior in prison—and were harsher in their reasons for denying parole.

How many of Bodenhausen and Wyer's subjects had ever been assaulted by a Latino or lost money to an Anglo-Saxon embezzler? Few, if any—for most stereotypes are not based on valid experiences, but rather on hearsay, or images disseminated by the mass media or generated within our heads, as a way of justifying our own prejudices and cruelty. It can be helpful to think of blacks or Latinos as stupid or dangerous if it justifies depriving them of an education or denying them parole, and it is helpful to think of women as being biologically predisposed toward domestic drudgery if a male-dominated society wants to keep them tied to a vacuum cleaner. Likewise, it is useful to think that individuals from the lower classes are lazy, stupid, and prone to criminal behavior if it justifies paying them as little as possible for doing menial work or keeps them out of middle-class neighborhoods. Negative stereotypes, as John Jost and Mahzarin Banaji[31] have argued, can be comforting; they help us justify an unfair system in which some people are on the top and some are on the bottom. Moreover—and somewhat paradoxically—those

whom the system treats unfairly sometimes endorse these system-justifying stereotypes, as well. Much like the unhappy children in Jack Brehm's experiment (in Chapter 5) who adjusted their feelings about spinach when they learned that they would have to eat it often, people often adjust to an unfair system by convincing themselves the system is fair and that people on the bottom—even themselves—get what they deserve.

Biased thinking of this sort can have harmful consequences in everyday life. In one striking example, Charles Bond and his colleagues[32] compared the treatment of black versus white patients in a psychiatric hospital run by an all-white staff. In their research, they looked at the two most common methods staff members used to handle incidents of violent behavior by patients: secluding the individual in a "time-out" room or restraining the individual in a straitjacket, followed by the administration of a sedative drug. An examination of hospital records over an 85-day period revealed that the harsher method—physical restraint and sedation—was used against black patients nearly four times as often as against white patients, despite the fact that there was virtually no difference in the number of violent incidents committed by blacks and whites. Moreover, this discriminatory treatment occurred even though the black patients, on average, had been diagnosed as being less violent than the white patients when they were first admitted to the hospital. Over time, fortunately, the staff came to treat black and white patients equally, with the use of restraint against blacks declining after the first month of residence in the hospital.*

When people act rashly because of a stereotype, however, and lack the time and opportunity to learn they were wrong, the consequences can be disastrous, even fatal. In 1999, a 23-year-old black man named Amadou Diallo was standing near his apartment in the Bronx section of New York City when he was spotted by four plainclothes policemen who were driving by in an unmarked car. Diallo

*Evidently, stereotyping and prejudice against blacks as a group was in operation when black patients were relative newcomers to the hospital; then, as familiarity between white staff members and a particular black patient increased, prejudiced behavior against that individual diminished. Thus, this study suggests that the familiarity that comes with prolonged interracial contact can potentially reduce unfair stereotyping and pave the way for recognition of individual characteristics. But, as we shall see, contact between the races, in itself, is usually insufficient to break down well-entrenched stereotypes and bigotry.

fit the description of a serial rapist the police were seeking, so the officers approached him. Startled and frightened, Diallo ran up the stairway to his apartment, apparently ignoring the officers' commands to stop and show his hands. Then Diallo reached into his pocket and withdrew an object. One of the officers yelled, "Gun!" and he and his fellow officers opened fire, killing Diallo with a hail of bullets. They learned too late that Diallo was not the person they were after, and the "gun" he had pulled from his pocket turned out to be his wallet; he was trying to show his identification. Sadly, numerous police shootings of innocent black men have taken place since then.[33]

Joshua Correll and his associates[34] designed an experiment to re-create the experience of police officers who have to make quick decisions when confronted with black or white suspects. Using a realistic video game, in which participants had to make immediate decisions whether to shoot a suspect, the researchers found that participants were quicker to shoot at armed black suspects than at armed white suspects. They also shot more quickly at a man who was merely holding a cell phone if the man was black rather than white. Interestingly, the results were just as strong among black participants as among white participants. If an ordinary citizen holds the stereotype that blacks are violent, it is unfortunate; if that ordinary person happens to be a police officer, the results can be tragic.

Stereotypes and Attributions Stereotyping is a special form of attribution. As we saw in Chapter 4, if a person performs an action, observers will make inferences about the cause. For example, if the tight end on your favorite football team drops an easy pass, there are many possible explanations: Perhaps the sun got in his eyes; maybe he was distracted by worry over the ill health of his child; maybe he dropped the ball on purpose because he bet on the other team; or perhaps he just happens to be an untalented player. Note that each of these attributions about the cause of the tight end's bobble has a very different set of ramifications. You would feel differently about him if he were worried about his child's illness than if he had bet on the other team.

As you know, our need to find a cause for another person's behavior is part of the human tendency to go beyond the information given. It is often functional. Suppose you have just moved into a