

in senior management positions in itself indicate discriminatory hiring policies? Is the underrepresentation of people of color in medical schools in the United States and on college faculties de facto proof of racism in society or does it result from a lack of qualified applicants or candidates? Who determines what it means to be qualified? How do we arrive at the criteria we use to admit students to colleges and professional schools or to hire senior management or faculty? Is it possible that the very criteria we employ already reflect subtle but pervasive racism and sexism? Can individuals and institutions be racist and sexist in the course of their normal everyday functioning quite apart from, even without, their conscious or explicit intent? These are some of the questions that will be raised as we explore the ways in which racism and sexism operate in our society.

Some people are uncomfortable with the words *racism* and *sexism* and prefer to talk about prejudice and discrimination. In Selection 1, the members of the United States Commission on Civil Rights provide us with a survey of race and gender discrimination, past and present. Beginning with examples of discrimination by individuals, they go on to examine organizational and structural discrimination, and conclude with a discussion of the ways in which such treatment forms an interlocking and self-perpetuating *process of discrimination*. Fundamental to this process is the social construction of race, class, and gender as difference, as we have seen in Part I.

Those who wish to emphasize the complex and powerful nature of relations of subordination and domination, as well as the interlocking and self-perpetuating nature of discrimination as a process, find the term *discrimination* too narrow and too limited. They argue that words such as *racism*, *sexism*, and *oppression* are more appropriate because they capture the comprehensive, systemic nature of the phenomena we are studying. They use these terms to point to a complex and pervasive system of beliefs, policies, practices, and attitudes that interrelate with incredible intricacy, subtlety, and force.

In Selection 2, Marilyn Frye explicitly introduces the concept of *oppression* to describe the pervasive nature of sexism and illustrates how it is possible to participate unintentionally in the continued subordination of women. Frye uses the metaphor of a birdcage to illustrate how sexism imprisons its victims through the interlocking operation of a series of impediments to motion. Taken alone, none of the barriers seems very powerful or threatening; taken together, they construct a cage that appears light and airy, masking the fact that its occupants are trapped as firmly as if they were in a sealed vault. Although Frye focuses on sexism, it is relatively easy to apply the same metaphor and analysis to explicate racism.

Frye follows her discussion of the birdcage metaphor with some examples of seemingly innocent but oppressive practices that will undoubtedly disturb some readers. She takes as her paradigm, or model, the "male door-opening ritual" and argues that its meaning and implications go far beyond the conscious intentions of the man who opens the door. As you think about her example, remember that Frye is analyzing the implications of a social ritual, not looking at any individual's motives for following that ritual. The point is that sexism and racism can and are perpetuated by people who are just trying to be nice.

Gloria Yamato's essay discusses racism as oppression and describes the forms it can take: aware/blatant racism, aware/covert racism, unaware/unintentional racism, and unaware/self-righteous racism, as well as the way in which racism can be internalized by its victims. After exploring the connection between race and class oppression, she concludes her essay with some positive suggestions for all of us who want to come to terms with racism and, by implication, with sexism as well.

Yamato's analysis is carried a step further in Rita Chaudhry Sethi's essay, which focuses on the experiences of Asians in the U.S.. Sethi argues that our understanding of racism in this country has been narrowly derived from the African-American experience and, as a consequence, often fails to recognize and name the racism experienced by Asians and other ethnic groups. Insofar as members of these communities have internalized this narrow paradigm, Sethi maintains they themselves often fail to identify the discrimination they experience as racism. She urges us to broaden our understanding of racism to be more inclusive of the experiences of a variety of ethnic groups.

As these essays suggest, defining racism and sexism is a difficult but essential undertaking. It is made difficult both by the complexity of the phenomena themselves and by the powerful emotional reactions people have to the terms as well as the political consequences of applying them. But wrestling with the problem of definition is essential if we are to come to terms with the reality they denote. Current controversies over whether society should tolerate, protect, or prosecute hate speech; whether we should punish bias crimes more severely than other acts of violence; how we should judge acts of violence carried out by victims of battery and abuse against their victimizers; and similar questions, require that we be able to identify language and actions that are racist, sexist, and homophobic.

Perhaps the most commonly adopted definitions of racism and sexism describe them as any policy, practice, belief, or attitude that attributes characteristics or status to individuals based upon their race or their sex. Many people use the terms in this way, and the universal nature of these definitions gives them obvious appeal. However, in spite of their appeal, there are serious problems with them because they fail to distinguish racism and sexism from a somewhat different phenomenon, *prejudice*.

Prejudice is a general feeling of dislike for people, perhaps even hatred of them, based upon some characteristic they have or are believed to possess. Prejudice may be based on race, sex, or ethnicity, or on hair color, religion, style of dress, or just about any characteristic you can think of. In contrast, racism and sexism require not prejudice alone but *prejudice plus power*. When we use these terms rather than "prejudice" or "discrimination," we highlight the unequal distribution of power in this society and we draw attention to the elaborate interlocking system of rituals, stereotypes, institutions, punishments, and rewards that have functioned historically to reinforce male privilege and white-skin privilege.

Understood in this way *racism involves the subordination of people of color by white people* and *sexism involves the subordination of women by men*. While individual persons of color or women may well discriminate against white people or

others because of their color or ethnicity, and while some women may well discriminate against men because of their sex, strictly speaking, this does not qualify as racism or sexism according to our definition. Such discrimination doesn't qualify as racism or sexism because neither the person of color nor the woman can depend upon all the institutions of society to enforce or extend his or her personal dislike. Nor can he or she call upon the force of history to reflect and reinforce that prejudice.

For example, let us assume that the teacher at the front of the room is a person of color who doesn't like white people or a woman who is prejudiced against men. In class he or she can act on this prejudice, but outside the classroom he or she is likely to be the object of institutionalized and comprehensive prejudice, which is what is meant by racism and sexism. If the teacher visits the town where his or her students live, he or she may well be harassed rather than welcomed. If the teacher visits a building on campus where he or she is not known, he or she may be mistaken for a janitor or perhaps be asked to do some photocopying. When white women or women and men of color who are college faculty meet their students in the public world, they are likely to have less status, power, and choices than white students half their age.

For this reason, even if a person of color gives a speech filled with vicious racial hatred or carries out violence against others because of their white skin, it is not, strictly speaking, racism. It may be despicable and it can be condemned and deplored, but it doesn't qualify as racism because the element of power is not present. Failing to call it racism is not a way of excusing, much less, approving of inexcusable hate language or violence. It is simply a way of being consistent and precise in the way we analyze social phenomena. Our definitions of racism and sexism reflect the history of the world that provides us with a long record of white people and men holding power and using that power and privilege over people of color and white women to subordinate and dehumanize them, not the reverse. In the words of Gloria Yamato, "People of color can be prejudiced against one another and whites, but do not have an ice-cube's chance in hell of passing laws that will get whites sent to relocation camps 'for their own protection and the security of the nation.'"

In cases of interethnic-group hostility, as, for example, between or among Koreans, Blacks, or Puerto Ricans, or gender-based prejudice against women expressed by other women, it is appropriate to say that this kind of prejudice *reflects* the racism and/or the sexism of our society. It is a product of our history of oppression—its effect, not its cause. Ironically, racist stereotyping and hatred within and among people of color, like sexism within these groups, divides people who are potential allies. In this way it serves to reinforce rather than challenge the real causes of inequality and violence in our society.

Part II concludes with three newspaper stories that describe different aspects of contemporary life. The first article, "Death of A Teenager Widens a Racial Rift between Two Towns," examines the ways in which white people and people of color literally and metaphorically often live in different worlds, even when they live only a few blocks apart. In the telling of this tragedy from the perspectives of people of