Introduction:
Human conflict can result in crime, war, and mass murder, such as genocide. Prejudice and discrimination often are root causes of human conflict, which explains how strangers come to hate one another to the extreme of causing others harm. Prejudice and discrimination affect everyone. In this section we will examine the definitions of prejudice and discrimination, examples of these concepts, and causes of these biases.

UNDERSTANDING PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION
As we discussed in the opening story of Trayvon Martin (week 9 reading), humans are very diverse and although we share many similarities, we also have many differences. The social groups we belong to help form our identities. These differences may be difficult for some people to reconcile, which may lead to prejudice toward people who are different. **Prejudice is a negative attitude and feeling toward an individual based solely on one's membership in a particular social group.** Prejudice is common against people who are members of an unfamiliar cultural group. Thus, certain types of education, contact, interactions, and building relationships with members of different cultural groups can reduce the tendency toward prejudice. In fact, simply imagining interacting with members of different cultural groups might affect prejudice. Furthermore, imagined social interaction can reduce anxiety associated with inter-group interactions.

What are some examples of social groups that you belong to that contribute to your identity? **Social groups can include gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, religion, sexual orientation, profession, and many more.** And, as is true for social roles, you can simultaneously be a member of more than one social group.

An example of prejudice is having a negative attitude toward people who are not born in the United States. Although people holding this prejudiced attitude do not know all people who were not born in the United States, they dislike them due to their status as foreigners.

Prejudice often begins in the form of a stereotype—that is, a specific belief or assumption about individuals based solely on their membership in a group, regardless of their individual characteristics. **Stereotypes become overgeneralized and applied to all members of a group.** For example, someone holding prejudiced attitudes toward older adults, may believe that older adults are slow and incompetent. We cannot possibly know each individual person of advanced age to know that all older adults are slow and incompetent. Therefore, this negative belief is overgeneralized to all members of the group, even though many of the individual group members may in fact be spry and intelligent.
Another example of a well-known stereotype involves beliefs about racial differences among athletes. As Hodge, Burden, Robinson, and Bennett (2008) point out, Black male athletes are often believed to be more athletic, yet less intelligent, than their White male counterparts. These beliefs persist despite a number of high profile examples to the contrary. Sadly, such beliefs often influence how these athletes are treated by others and how they view themselves and their own capabilities. Whether or not you agree with a stereotype, stereotypes are generally well-known within a given culture (Devine, 1989).

Sometimes people will act on their prejudiced attitudes toward a group of people, and this behavior is known as discrimination. Discrimination is negative action toward an individual as a result of one’s membership in a particular group. As a result of holding negative beliefs (stereotypes) and negative attitudes (prejudice) about a particular group, people often treat the target of prejudice poorly, such as excluding older adults from their circle of friends.

Have you ever been the target of discrimination? If so, how did this negative treatment make you feel?

| Assignment 1 |
| Directions: Using the introduction, answer the questions below in complete sentences. |
| 1. What is prejudice? |
| 2. What is a stereotype? |
| 3. Explain one example of a stereotype. |

TYPES OF PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

When we meet strangers we automatically process three pieces of information about them: their race, gender, and age. Why are these aspects of an unfamiliar person so important? Why don’t we instead notice whether their eyes are friendly, whether they are smiling, their height, the type of clothes they are wearing? Although these secondary characteristics are important in forming a first impression of a stranger, the social categories of race, gender, and age provide a wealth of information about an individual. This information, however, often is based on stereotypes. We may have different expectations of strangers depending on their race, gender, and age. What stereotypes and prejudices do you hold about people who are from a race, gender, and age group different from your own?

Racism

Racism is prejudice and discrimination against an individual based solely on one’s membership in a specific racial group (such as toward African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, European Americans).

Racism exists for many racial and ethnic groups. For example, Blacks are significantly more likely to have their vehicles searched during traffic stops than Whites, particularly when Blacks are driving in predominantly White neighborhoods, (a phenomenon often termed “DWB,” or “driving while Black.”) Mexican Americans and other Latino groups also are targets of racism from some police and other
members of the community. For example, when purchasing items with a personal check, Latino shoppers are more likely than White shoppers to be asked to show formal identification. In one case of alleged harassment by the police, several East Haven, Connecticut, police officers were arrested on federal charges due to reportedly continued harassment and brutalization of Latinos. When the accusations came out, the mayor of East Haven was asked, “What are you doing for the Latino community today?” The Mayor responded, “I might have tacos when I go home, I’m not quite sure yet” ("East Haven Mayor," 2012) This statement undermines the important issue of racial profiling and police harassment of Latinos, while belittling Latino culture by emphasizing an interest in food stereotypically associated with Latinos.

**Racism is prevalent toward many other groups in the United States including Native Americans, Arab Americans, Jewish Americans, and Asian Americans.** Have you witnessed racism toward any of these racial or ethnic groups? Are you aware of racism in your community?

**One reason modern forms of racism, and prejudice in general, are hard to detect is related to the dual attitudes model.** Humans have two forms of attitudes: explicit attitudes, which are conscious and controllable, and implicit attitudes, which are unconscious and uncontrollable. Because holding egalitarian views is socially desirable, most people do not show extreme racial bias or other prejudices on measures of their explicit attitudes. However, measures of implicit attitudes often show evidence of mild to strong racial bias or other prejudices.

**Sexism**

**Sexism is prejudice and discrimination toward individuals based on their sex.** Typically, sexism takes the form of men holding biases against women, but either sex can show sexism toward their own or their opposite sex. Like racism, sexism may be subtle and difficult to detect. Common forms of sexism in modern society include gender role expectations, such as expecting women to be the caretakers of the household. Sexism also includes people’s expectations for how members of a gender group should behave. For example, women are expected to be friendly, passive, and nurturing, and when women behave in an unfriendly, assertive, or neglectful manner they often are disliked for violating their gender role. Research by Laurie Rudman (1998) finds that when female job applicants self-promote, they are likely to be viewed as competent, but they may be disliked and are less likely to be hired because they violated gender expectations for modesty. Sexism can exist on a societal level such as in hiring, employment opportunities, and education. Women are less likely to be hired or promoted in male-dominated professions such as engineering, aviation, and construction.

Have you ever experienced or witnessed sexism? Think about your family members’ jobs or careers. Why do you think there are differences in the jobs women and men have, such as more women nurses but more male surgeons?

**Ageism**

People often form judgments and hold expectations about people based on their age. These judgments and expectations can lead to ageism, or prejudice and discrimination toward individuals based solely on their age. Typically, ageism occurs against older adults, but ageism also can occur toward younger adults.

Think of expectations you hold for older adults. How could someone’s expectations influence the feelings they hold toward individuals from older age groups? Ageism is widespread in U.S. culture, and a common ageist attitude toward older adults is that they are incompetent, physically weak, and slow and some people consider older adults less attractive. Some cultures, however, including some Asian, Latino, and African American cultures, both outside and within the United States afford older adults respect and honor.

Ageism can also occur toward younger adults. What expectations do you hold toward younger people?
Does society expect younger adults to be immature and irresponsible? How might these two forms of ageism affect a younger and older adult who are applying for a sales clerk position?

**Assignment 2**

**Directions:** Using the information in the packet, answer the questions below.

1. What are the first things that we process about a person when we meet them? What are the second things we process?

2. Explain how ageism has been used against older adults.

3. Now that you have read about what prejudice is and how widespread it is, name one way in which you can stop some of the main prejudices found in America?

**WHY DO PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION EXIST?**

Prejudice and discrimination persist in society due to social learning and conformity to social norms. Children learn prejudiced attitudes and beliefs from society: their parents, teachers, friends, the media, and other sources of socialization, such as Facebook. If certain types of prejudice and discrimination are acceptable in a society, there may be normative pressures to conform and share those prejudiced beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, public and private schools are still somewhat segregated by social class. Historically, only children from wealthy families could afford to attend private schools, whereas children from middle- and low-income families typically attended public schools. If a child from a low-income family received a merit scholarship to attend a private school, how might the child be treated by classmates? Can you recall a time when you held prejudiced attitudes or beliefs or acted in a discriminatory manner because your group of friends expected you to?

**STEREOTYPES AND SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY**

When we hold a stereotype about a person, we have expectations that he or she will fulfill that stereotype. A self-fulfilling prophecy is an expectation held by a person that alters his or her behavior in a way that tends to make it true. When we hold stereotypes about a person, we tend to treat the person according to our expectations. This treatment can influence the person to act according to our stereotypic expectations, thus confirming our stereotypic beliefs. Research by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that disadvantaged students whose teachers expected them to perform well had higher grades than disadvantaged students whose teachers expected them to do poorly.

Consider this example of cause and effect in a self-fulfilling prophecy: If an employer expects an openly gay male job applicant to be incompetent, the potential employer might treat the applicant negatively during the interview by engaging in less conversation, making little eye contact, and generally behaving
coldly toward the applicant. In turn, the job applicant will perceive that the potential employer dislikes him, and he will respond by giving shorter responses to interview questions, making less eye contact, and generally disengaging from the interview. After the interview, the employer will reflect on the applicant’s behavior, which seemed cold and distant, and the employer will conclude, based on the applicant's poor performance during the interview, that the applicant was in fact incompetent. Thus, the employer’s stereotype—gay men are incompetent and do not make good employees—is reinforced. Do you think this job applicant is likely to be hired? Treating individuals according to stereotypic beliefs can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

Another dynamic that can reinforce stereotypes is confirmation bias. When interacting with the target of our prejudice, we tend to pay attention to information that is consistent with our stereotypic expectations and ignore information that is inconsistent with our expectations. In this process, known as confirmation bias, we seek out information that supports our stereotypes and ignore information that is inconsistent with our stereotypes. In the job interview example, the employer may not have noticed that the job applicant was friendly and engaging, and that he provided competent responses to the interview questions in the beginning of the interview. Instead, the employer focused on the job applicant’s performance in the later part of the interview, after the applicant changed his demeanor and behavior to match the interviewer’s negative treatment.

Have you ever fallen prey to the self-fulfilling prophecy or confirmation bias, either as the source or target of such bias? How might we stop the cycle of the self-fulfilling prophecy? Social class stereotypes of individuals tend to arise when information about the individual is ambiguous. If information is unambiguous, stereotypes do not tend to arise.

IN-GROUPS AND OUT-GROUPS
As discussed previously in this section, we all belong to a gender, race, age, and social economic group. These groups provide a powerful source of our identity and self-esteem. These groups serve as our in-groups. An in-group is a group that we identify with or see ourselves as belonging to. A group that we don’t belong to, or an out-group, is a group that we view as fundamentally different from us. For example, if you are female, your gender in-group includes all females, and your gender out-group includes all males. People often view gender groups as being fundamentally different from each other in personality traits, characteristics, social roles, and interests. Because we often feel a strong sense of belonging and emotional connection to our in-groups, we develop in-group bias: a preference for our own group over other groups. This in-group bias can result in prejudice and discrimination because the out-group is perceived as different and is less preferred than our in-group.

Despite the group dynamics that seem only to push groups toward conflict, there are forces that promote reconciliation between groups: the expression of empathy, of acknowledgment of past suffering on both sides, and the halt of destructive behaviors. One function of prejudice is to help us feel good about ourselves and maintain a positive self-concept. This need to feel good about ourselves extends to our in-groups: We want to feel good and protect our in-groups. We seek to resolve threats individually and at the in-group level. This often happens by blaming an out-group for the problem. Scapegoating is the act of blaming an out-group when the in-group experiences frustration or is blocked from obtaining a goal.

Assignment 3

Directions: Answer the constructed response question below in at least 3 to 6 sentences.

Question: Name at least one stereotype that could turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy* in your
own life. Explain how you can overcome this prophecy and who you can confide in to help you meet your life goals. (*Self-fulfilling prophecy- a prediction that causes itself to be true due to the behavior of the believer.*)