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POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS: STEREOTYPES, PREJUDICES, AND RACISM

Objectives

At the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- Describe the origin of stereotype, prejudices, and racism.
- Describe the danger of stereotype, prejudices, and racism.
- Given a specific case, recognize stereotypes, prejudices, and racism.
- Given a specific case, propose an alternative solution or scenario that would be more culturally appropriate.

STEREOTYPE

Everybody knows some jokes about stereotypes of a cultural group. The most common is the one about "Hell and Heaven". This joke begins:

> Heaven is a place where: The police are British, the chefs are French, the lovers are Italian, and everything is organized by the Germans.
> Hell is a place where: The police are French, the chefs are British, the lovers are Germans, and everything is organized by the Italian.

The fact that people in each cited country can have a laugh suggests that there is a grain of truth in this joke. There is an overwhelming perception that the Italians are erotic and chaotic, and that the Germans are much better than the Italian in structuring their life but at the same time can be quite uptight when expressing emotion. As for the British, their gastronomy is far from on par with that of the French (in fact French cuisine is so tasty that it has been awarded World Heritage status by UNESCO), but the British are known for seeing authority as a professional privilege while the French may perceive authority as a right and make it less open to question.

A stereotype is a fixed, over-generalized belief about a particular group of people or a co- culture. No matter how accurate or inaccurate a stereotype is, it is mostly based on some reality, some truth, albeit just a kernel of truth or half-truth, something that actually happened. The moment we realize that we come into contact with others, we will start *seeking similarities* to connect. Universally, it is a very natural inclination that we seek to be near people with whom we share common outlooks, habits, or languages. The more points we can connect, the more comfortable we feel and the quicker we can establish a new relationship.[1] It can be somewhat unfair when certain groups of people are criticized: "They don't mingle! They always stick together!" There is nothing wrong with seeking ethnic similarities since it is only natural for all of us to do so. What really matters is when we fail to find common backgrounds, will we have the courage to overcome anxiety and move ahead, or will we *withdraw* all together from interaction with the unknown?

Regardless of our choice when confronted with uncertainty, stereotypes are certain to be formed as the result of this confrontation. We tend to think about stereotypes as a bad thing, that only racists and bigots engage in pigeonholing others. Yet all of us are guilty of putting others in a box, despite the fact that our knowledge about them is just a grain of truth or half-truth.

The origin of stereotype

The cognitive nature of stereotype. Universally, stereotyping is a natural process. We absolutely need it to survive. But how is a stereotype formed?

We are often put in a situation where we fail to see any similarities or lack any experience. At the same time, we still need to make sense of the situation and react in a limited amount of time. Stereotype is the result of this mismatch. Our mind forms a stereotype by connecting bits of *loose information* in order to reach a significant *whole* – something that gives us a meaning so we can make a decision and

react quickly. Consider this example: It is not for nothing that sales pages are often very long, with a lot of information in bullets, many experts' recommendations and testimonies of satisfied customers. This is done in the hope that our mind will connect the loose information and give us a big picture of "a good product", which prompts our swift decision to buy it without having to actually use it first. This mental shortcut helps us to retain knowledge using minimal thinking effort, providing us a sense of structure to deal with an otherwise too chaotic universe.[2] It is bad, but it is also crucial. Some call it a "necessary evil", and that is a pretty good way to describe it.

Categorizing people. Not only categorizing inanimate objects, our brains also categorize people in more or less the same way. Suppose you have never had a chance to get to know the Italian decently. There are about 60 million of them, thus at least 60 million sets of information – a number that is impossible to process. Stereotypes can now step in, using categories to help simplify and systematize information, putting *all* Italians into some fixed sets of characteristics; for example in our joke of "hell and heaven", they are portrayed as being chaotic with work structure and passionate in love affairs. In a nutshell, stereotypes maximize t h e difference *between* cultures (the Italians are completely different from the British…etc.), and maximize similarity *within* a culture (all Italians have this characteristic). Now that things have been "sorted out" and put in boxes, the world should look much simpler, and thus easier to understand; we can save time and energy to act more efficiently. Next time we meet an Italian, we can quickly draw on this stereotype and make our decision in a blink of an eye.

…Or can we?

The expressions of stereotypes

Looking from the cognitive function of stereotyping, there is nothing wrong with the act of categorizing. Our mind has evolved to conduct this vital process so we as humans can effectively manage our life, develop our skills, and conquer the world that is otherwise too big, too complicated, and impossible to know i n all i t s details. We all create stereotypes as it is a universal process at both the collective and individual level.

However, the major problem with this seemingly natural process is that while our brains can be quite adept at categorizing inanimate objects, we run into problems when categorizing people, because people are much more complicated than objects.

Everyone is pigeonholed in a category. The first and foremost problem with stereotyping is the tendency to put every single person in to a fixed and known category. On the Inverted Pyramid model, we should clearly see that this process of pigeonholing actually measures the wrong level of analysis. Starting at the *collective level*, we know that certain groups have certain *typical* outward expressions and values. We then jump to the *individual level* and assume that every single person at this level also shares exactly those same expressions and values: you are a man, so you should be tough; you are a nurse, then very likely you are a woman in a white outfit with a little cap; you are Irish, well, for sure you drink like a fish, etc.

Let's pick on the stereotypes we just listed: It may be true that in general men are *expected* to hold back emotion, but a study has found that young men are more emotionally affected by relationship woes than women.[3] Similarly, it may be true that many nurses are female, but 21% of nurses in Italy and 32% of nurses in Saudi Arabia are male, and still rising.[4] Finally, the Irish may drink a lot, ranking 18th on the alcohol consumption per year,[5] but one in five adults in Ireland don't drink at all. If you put everyone in the typical stereotypes, in these cases, then you are wrong at least one of every five times.

Obviously, a trait at the collective level, no matter how typical it is, cannot be applied to everyone at the individual level. A person is not her/his culture or nationality. As a matter of fact, the cultural background of a person tells us absolutely nothing certain about her/his personality. To make matters worse, when we use stereotypes, we *deny people their individual identity*. By insisting that a person is just a random unit of many similar copies from a mass collection, we deny this person's sense of self and personhood, what is special and unique. We please the comfort of our mind and deny the right for individual and collective complexity to exist.

In the first chapter, we emphasized the nature of multiple identities. Everyone has more than one identity, based on race, gender, nationality, religion, or profession. In an ever changing world of globalization, immigration and interracial marriages, individual identities can become *lego identities* which can be both ascribed and situational. Identities depend on a specific context that a person consciously or sub-consciously chooses. Many people of mixed background opt to behave differently, to change their perspective and value system flexibly when communicating in various group settings. Using stereotypes in such a diverse environment not only risks pigeonholing people in a simplistic box but also risks pigeonholing them in the wrong box, which is what we will look at in the next section.

Making incorrect categories. Another danger of stereotyping is that we tend to gather misleading information. For example, we experience some *non-typical individual* outward expressions or values, and assume that the whole *collective* group has the same outward expressions or values, and that these outward expressions and values are *typical* of that group: Some black people commit a crime so black people are criminals, and being criminal is the typical trait of the black culture; Some Muslims are terrorists so Muslims are terrorists, and being terrorist is a typical Islamic way; I met some arrogant Canadians so Canadians are arrogant, and being arrogant is a typical Canadian value, etc. A famous example that reveals the absurdity of "guilt by association" is the wordplay in the BBC sitcom *Yes, Prime Minister*: "All dogs have four legs. My cat has four legs. My cat is a dog."

In the process of oversimplifying a category, erasing all the grey and overlapping areas to make things easier to understand, we not only discard nuances and complications but also distort the whole picture. What is an exception can easily become a norm. Some isolated behaviors can unfairly become generalized trademarks that represent all other members. We risk making simplistic or faulty claims about not just a person but also the whole group.

The impact of media. The danger of making all-inclusive categories has been worsened by media and social networks. Many stereotypes promoted by mass media are exaggerated and based on half-truths. What should be a non-typical and exceptional incident can create the illusion that it is the actual

norm. A good example of this phenomenon is the connection between air travel and fear of a p l a n e crash. Although flying is the safest of all transportation modes, each time a plane is down, the whole world is shaken with constant and excessive amounts of news and reports, creating an impression that it is dangerous to fly. Similarly, the abundance of media attention on a certain topic can trick many of us into casual assumptions, for example, people from the Gulf are oil millionaires, or the standard beauty of a modern woman is exactly the same as how a catwalk model or a Barbie doll looks. The incredible network of media such as television channels, movies, newspapers, radios, social sites, books, comics, etc. is partly responsible for creating a distorted image of many cultures and co-cultures, either pigeonholing people extensively or focusing on *irregular traits* and turning them into *typical trademarks*. When exceptions become the norms, stereotypes that stem from this categorization can be destructive since it is incongruent with reality, and yet, is still considered to be the standard.

Recently, there have been some trends to fight against prevalent stereotypes in the media. In 2013, the campaign against sexism in the toy industry has taken some significant turns with retail giant Toys "R" Us agreeing to drop sexist marketing and gender stereotyping of its products to girls and boys[6]. The toy store has bowed to pressure from shoppers concerned with the impact toys have on children, influencing their standard of morality, social behaviors, educational goals and future careers. Swedish catalogues already show gender neutral photos, including images of a girl shooting a Nerf gun and a boy playing with a baby doll, or pictures of boys and girls using a play kitchen. Running ahead are some global brands such as Dove who have been quick to capitalize on the counter-stereotype movement. Its "Campaign For Real Beauty" is one of modern marketing's most talked-about success stories. The billboard campaign featuring six ordinary women with their natural curves and body figures resulted in a 700% increase in sales, boosting Dove's share of the firming lotion market from 1% to 6%.[7]

Stereotypes and the impact on society. Firstly, stereotypes trap us in a frame that filters out all information that is not consistent with our assumptions. We tend to disregard or ignore facts that challenge our beliefs, especially when we do not have the resources to counter argue that information.[8] Stereotypes are very stable and difficult to change. Even when we are confronted with instances that contradict stereotypes, we tend to assume that this is just a special case. For example, if you hold the common stereotype that gay men are soft and unathletic, when meeting an athletic and assertive gay man, you would be more likely to conclude that this person is *not* a typical gay man, and that gay men in general are *still* soft and unathletic. Further, this selective filter will reinforce *only* information that suits your assumption. In a nutshell, you only see what you want to see. Consequently, you are misled into making decisions based on half-truths.

Secondly, stereotypes deny the existence of those that do not fit the assumptions. The story of this blogger vividly illustrates his frustration:

> "I'm a black man who grew up surrounded by white people. Growing up, I was the only black person in my neighborhood, my school, and sometimes it felt like the entire town. I never played basketball. I can't rap or dance well – I don't even like hip hop. I'm really good at video games and I watch baseball. When I got to college, my skin made me too black to fit in with the white kids, and my skills/hobbies weren't black enough to fit in with the black kids.

It sucks to feel like you're in the minority sometimes. It sucks even more to feel like you're not even good enough for the minority." [9]

Another case in point is women and the numerous stereotypes they have to struggle with. Generally, seen as homemakers and as a result, *all* women tend to be seen as a homogeneous mass, everyone is the same, and everyone wants to be, should be, or has to be a family's care-giver. This social expectation influences all women and many have to struggle much harder than their male counterparts to advance in the workplace. Popular profiles of girls and women have been presented as young, thin, beautiful, passive, dependent, and often incompetent. At the same time, boys and men are portrayed as active, adventurous, powerful, sexually aggressive, and largely uninvolved in human relationships.[10] An obvious example is many humorous and stereotypic photos/comics depicting a bride victoriously or desperately dragging her groom into a wedding while the man shows a saddened face of "game over". This sort of image perpetuates the false idea that a woman's life purpose is all about a wedding and nest building, and a man's mission is to be able to escape it. It is of course not true, but it has become a thing that few will bother to argue. Societies trapped into this stereotype will fail to pay due respect and give equal opportunities to half of the workforce. Countless women are not seen as active citizens who want to pursue serious careers, who strive to be executives, who desire to lead and make an impact, or those who just want to be single or child-free.

Fig 1. 1st Place in Engagement Portrait, Summer 2014, Singapore (Raymond Phang)

Thirdly, stereotypes can create self-fulfilling prophecies due to the link between belief and behavior. In essence, your performance will be influenced by what people generally think about your group, and hence, indirectly think about you. For example, when white men are reminded of the assumption that they have lower athletic ability than black men, they also perform worse than those white men who were not made aware of this stereotype.[11] Similarly, women are stereotyped to be less able than men in technical and mathematic jobs – a myth that has been proved wrong since women can perform equally as well as men.[12] This effect of stereotyping is so detrimental in the sense that it can drive us away from putting more effort into solving the problem. Instead, it puts us in doubt of our own ability and attributes this weakness to our age, race, gender, nationality, skin color, etc.: "Why can't I do it? Is it because what people say is correct? Maybe the stereotype is correct! Oh dear! It *is* indeed correct!"

Finally, there are also positive stereotypes. You would logically think: "If a negative stereotype makes

people perform worse than their actual ability, then a positive one would make them perform better." That is partly true. However, no matter how positive they are, stereotypes are still stereotypes, and you will always fail to grasp the whole picture by using them. Further, positive stereotypes can be quite detrimental since it sets the bar unrealistically high, causing the holders to be disappointed when facing the truth, and at the same time, loading unnecessary burdens on those who are viewed with stereotypes. A classic example is the way Asians tend to be the victim of Model Minority – an assumption that Asians in Western societies achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average. Despite the fact that Asian minorities have been also marginalized and face similar racism as other ethnicities, this positive stereotype creates an illusion that Asians do not suffer from social inequality, thus, brushing away problems and taking away the chance that the disadvantaged deserve. Worse, this positive stereotype has been used to justify the exclusion of those in need in the distribution of government support.[13] In the 1980s, several Ivy League schools admitted that they chose other minority groups over Asian applicants in an attempt to promote a national agenda in racial diversity.[14] Holding Asians to a much higher standard also presses them to live up to unrealistic expectation, causing tremendous stress and mental illness, even suicide attempts among young people who could not deal with pressure from parents and society to be exceptionally high achievers.[15]

From a broader perspective, especially in a multicultural society, maintaining positive stereotypes of one specific group accentuates negative stereotypes of others (e.g. they are lazy; they are welfare-dependent; they are criminals, etc). It can actually promote legal injustice, social hostility, racial hatred, creating platforms to blame other groups for not being a model, falling short on the level of their contribution. In her book "Murder and the Reasonable Man", Cynthia Lee argues that the verdict on the shooting death of a black teenager by a Korean shop owner was influenced by the positive stereotype of the shooter as "unfortunate victim of 'bad' African or Latino looters".[16] This event contributed to the LA riot in 1992 and has left a tension between the two communities to this day.[17]

PREJUDICE

If stereotypes can be both positive and negative, prejudices are often deeply held negative feelings associated with a particular group. Built into the notion of prejudice is a sense of hostility and judgment. While stereotypes may be free from value and evaluation (e.g. People from Latin America are Catholics), prejudices are loaded with feelings about what is good and what is bad, what is moral and immoral (e.g. "My religion is the only true one, and my God is the only true God.") Consequently, people with prejudices are very likely to end up with hostile encounters where each side believes that their view is right. When this *negative feeling* of prejudice is translated into an *ability to act*, we have discrimination.

The origin of prejudice

Similar to stereotypes, forming prejudices is the result of 25 million years of primate evolutionary heritage[18].

Groups as survival adaption and Group love. In chapter 1, we discussed how human beings are the only species capable of moving beyond family boundaries, forming different non-kin groups in order to maximize our chance of survival. In fact, many think that man's big brain evolved in part to cope with group living conditions. The group is primary because it protects individuals against human and non-human enemies. Naturally, we have evolved to build up a strong affection with our ingroup. This consequently leads to a tendency to distrust outgroup members (Social Identity Theory)[19] and to hold a bias towards others. In a nutshell, the hatred towards outgroups is a reflective image of the love towards ingroups. Our cruelty to "them" is the result of our kindness to "us".

This ingroup favoritism is strongly triggered when there are limited resources and there are possibilities of conflict. In fact, pretty much every conflict in human history has something to do with how people perceive the boundaries of in- and outgroup members across their own ethnicity, religion, social class or political affinity. The dual question of "who you are" and "who I am" underscores the most fundamental relationship of society: the bond between a person and her/his ingroup.

Group categorization. Since group living is directly connected with survival, our brains have evolved to be adept at recognizing who belong to our ingroup (i.e. who we can trust) and outgroup (i.e. who we should watch out for or fight against). We do this by placing people into different categories. The tendency to categorize people into ingroup or outgroup is so pervasive that we often automatically place others along very simple dimensions such as race, gender, and age. However, while this process can be quite accurate when categorizing inanimate objects, it can be faulty when categorizing people, since factors that define ingroup-outgroup are much more complex than visual elements such as race, gender, and age[20].

Fear factor. In our brain, there is an almond-shape structure called the amygdala. This is our danger detector or warning system, strongly connected with fear. For the purpose of survival, the amygdala filters all the sensory input, looking for anything that can be threatening, and then puts our system on high alert by igniting our sense of fear so we can stay away from them. Neuroscience studies tell us that when being shown faces of outgroup people, the amygdala often activates.[21] This helps to explain why people are less empathic toward outgroup members because our amygdale identify outgroup faces as potential threats.

The problem is that because our culture is filled with racial stereotypes and prejudices, our amygdala can wrongly adapt to prejudicial information about those who look different and consequently puts us on *false alarm*. The amygdala operates extremely fast, long before our conscious thoughts have time to react.[22]

Obviously, if left unchecked, the combination of all three factors (our love for ingroup; our tendency to categorize people into ingroup and outgroup; and our constantly alarming amygdala) can lead to the expression of some bias in a way that we don't intend. And this is not yet the end of the story. We will

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discuss various factors that can make this combination quite a nasty cocktail.

The expressions of prejudices

The attachment that we naturally have towards our ingroup is so strong that we not only favor our own group based on skin color, ethnicity, class, age, religion or gender, but we are capable to feel attached even to a group that is *randomly* formed and based on something very trivial. Divide any number of people into two different camps and after no time, participants will exhibit ingroup favoritism, giving preferential treatment to their own members. Negative prejudices stemming from this group-based environment are escalated to *acts of discrimination* through the following factors:

Conflict of resources. According to Realistic Conflict Theory, prejudices are formed when one group perceives the other(s) as a threat to their economic, political or cultural interest[23]. The dominant group will try to exploit or put down a minority group in order to maximize profits, to justify the dislike towards other groups, all because this minority has the potential to compete in the job market, and the dominant group wants to maintain their privilege, power and status.

Understandably, prejudice often finds its peak during crises. The recent economic downturn has seen many minority groups in the West fall victim to suspicion or hatred that was translated from economic interest to racial or religious prejudice. This negative feeling has led to various forms of discrimination. A historic case in point which offers a more complete "roller coaster" of prejudice is the Chinese immigrants in the US. This is what happened to them before they were lumped together with other Asian ethnicities, as a Model Minority of exemplary citizens:

> In the nineteenth-century American West, Chinese immigrants were hired to work in the gold mines, potentially taking jobs from white laborers. The white-run newspapers fomented prejudice against them, describing the Chinese as "depraved and vicious," "gross gluttons," "bloodthirsty and inhuman." Yet only a decade later, when the Chinese were willing to accept the dangerous, arduous work of building the transcontinental railroad – work that white laborers were unwilling to undertake – public prejudice toward them subsided, replaced by the opinion that the Chinese were sober, industrious, and law-abiding. "They are equal to the best white men," said the railroad tycoon Charles Crocker. "They are very trusty, very intelligent and they live up to their contracts." After the completion of the railroad, jobs again became scarce, and the end of the Civil War brought an influx of war veterans into an already tight job market. Anti-Chinese prejudice returned, with the press now describing the Chinese as "criminal," "conniving," "crafty," and "stupid."[24]

The Asian threat that was presented as Yellow Peril, later would also be associated with the Japanese during the mid-20th century as a result of their military ambition in WWII, and other South Asian immigrant groups under the labels Turban Tide and Hindoo Invasion. Similar prejudice towards blacks were mostly found in white groups that were just one rung above the blacks socio- economically, implying a close competition for jobs[25].

Even when there is no conflict, resources can also be a factor that triggers prejudice. Many people justify discrimination against other groups because it helps maintain their own economic advantage, "These immigrants have little education, so they are lucky to have the jobs we offer. We really don't need to pay them more." In this case, assuming immigrants are ignorant people is useful because it

justifies the discriminatory act of paying them less.

Conflict of desires and the game of blame. According to René Girard, we desire things because we see other people having them. In essence, what we want is triggered and borrowed from others. As time goes by, more and more people desire the same thing and this process quickly snowballs, creating hostility among different groups and individuals. As hatred rises, the society becomes destabilized; people then start looking for a way to ease their frustration and tendency to violence. This is the point where an individual or a group is singled out to get all the blame. This unfortunate individual or group is called a scapegoat. After the scapegoat is killed, social order will be restored since everyone believes that they have removed the cause of the trouble. Scapegoating acts as a psychological treatment, much like a sacrifice in worship rituals.

Due to the snowball effect of antagonism, the original and genuine cause of the problem is often too big or too vague for direct retaliation. Situations such as a bad economy, unemployment, loss of status and confidence, failure in management can cause unhappiness and frustration. However, they cannot strike out against the whole system. Instead, they lash out at something or someone more specific, ideally a minority. Blackening them with negative prejudice convinces us that they are the bad guys and they deserve their fate.

History is replete with horrific cases of scapegoating, at all levels of society. We love the blame game and love to hold someone responsible for our problems. In Greek mythology, it was Pandora who opened the jar of trouble; in Christianity, it was Eve who asked Adam to take the forbidden fruit so we still bear the original sin; in Nazi Germany, it was the Jews; When an economy struggles, nationalists tend to scapegoat minorities for economic woes and immigrants are quickly seen as those who "steal our jobs"[26]; When confronted with domestic problems, country leaders are adept at diverting public attention away with a "perfect enemy" elsewhere.[27] At the micro level, scapegoats are individuals such as a staff worker who get the blame for mismanagement.

Examples of famous scapegoats are Yoko Ono – John Lennon's wife – who shouldered the blame when the legendary Beatles broke up, or defender Andres Escobar who was held accountable and shot dead when Colombia lost the World Cup in1994.

> If homosexuality did not exist, we would have to invent it
> Jerry Falwell

Scapegoats are not always a person or a group. Many believe the 2008 financial and economic collapse was due to "greed", that the desire to accumulate more than what we need was the root of the crisis. Facing economic problems in Europe, another study in 2014 called governments not to take "public sectors" as scapegoats and punish them by wage cuts and retrenchment. According to the authors, the real culprit is inequality and the dysfunctional regime of financial accumulation. By cutting public expenditure, governments allow more inequality, more debt, and further bubbles, making the vicious cycle continue.[28]

Institutional support. A great deal of prejudice is embedded in the social systems of our societies through laws, regulations, operating procedures, objectives of governments and targets of corporations and other large entities. All together, they help "maintain the power of dominant groups over subordinate ones."[29] The apartheid regime in South Africa, the caste system in India, the legacy of slavery in America, or the exclusion of women from top positions in universities, religious entities, sports, and clubs are examples of how institutions can make a group of people look inferior, hence, deserving of the negative judgments and unequal treatment they receive.

To this day, a number of countries maintain a pronounced system of disparity among various groups. For example, Saudi Arabia still does not allow women to drive and open their own bank account, each of them needs to be in the presence of a male guardian, regardless of their age, whenever they go out, and the King only promised to grant Saudi women the right to vote in local elections in 2015. The system also extends to foreigners with all of them needing to have a sponsor who will provide permission to enter and leave the country, and all of them usually have their passports confiscated while still in Saudi, making the guest workers completely dependent on the mercy of their employers. In Dubai where foreigners make up almost 90% of the population, nationality largely decides one's salary rank: European on top, Arabs follow, and different Asian and African groups cover the middle and lower rungs.[30]

A popular form of institutionalized discrimination can happen at the stage of recruitment, for instance when the selection is (subconsciously) influenced by the names and addresses of the job applicants. In the UK, people with foreign sounding names are a third less likely to be shortlisted for jobs than people with white British sounding names.[31]

The media is another institutional support of prejudice and discrimination. Although journalism is expected to be objective, it is conducted by humans and humans are biased. Reporters reflect reality through their own eyes and are not completely free of stereotyping and prejudice. More often than not, newspapers tend to identify the racial or religious background of a suspect who belongs to a minority or scapegoat group (immigrants, guest workers, gays, women, religious or ethnic minorities, etc.). At the same time, they ignore the wrong-doer's background if this person belongs to a dominant culture. This selective exposure undoubtedly creates a distorted picture of the number of bad things committed by non-dominant groups. After the French newspaper Charlie Hebdo was attacked in January 2015, an old tweet from political commentator Sally Kohn snowballed into a trend because it hit this hypocrisy and prejudice:

> "Muslim shooter = entire religion guilty
> Black shooter = entire race guilty
> White shooter = mentally troubled lone wolf."[32]

What is interesting is the implied racial prejudice of group dominance, since white people would see those white criminals as exceptional individuals who do not represent their white identity. Now look from the Muslims' perspective. Witnessing the outrage of Muslims at the murderers and how they strongly condemned these attackers as *not* Muslims but simply horrible exceptional individuals who do not represent their identity, we can clearly see that for Muslims as well, these bad guys = mentally ill lone wolves.

Obviously, all of us are influenced by the tendency to stereotype the whole group of outsiders as a one-dimensional group based on the acts of some individuals. At the same time, we also want to protect our own group's interest and to isolate the bad guys as non- group members. This double standard is endemic for all groups, with no exception. In essence, it is part of our fundamental need for group attachment, hardwired into our brains through evolution. The viral power of media accentuates this tendency and turns a group's self-defense mechanism into an ugly battle of prejudice and discrimination towards other groups.

RACISM

Racism is the idea that *inherent superiority* of a particular race will define success and failure of a group. While the negative feeling towards other groups is justified by diverse factors (resources, economic setbacks, failure, ego, etc.), with racism, this negative feeling is replaced by a belief, and the justification for this belief, based purely on *genetic endowment*.

Although human beings belong to the same biological species, racism remains a world-wide problem. Dominant groups continue to assume that their superiority in biological endowment allows them to mistreat others on the basis of race. Nowadays, the concept of race has moved on to imply a culture, at the same time focusing on *simplistic* and *visual signals* of race and culture such as skin color, attire, body features, national origin, ancestry, religion, and sexual preference. This allows racism to be ignited easily even through very superficial contact.

The origin of racism

Racism is an extension of stereotypes and prejudice. Despite the many detrimental and disastrous impact of racism, from socio-biology's point of view, racism in part is also the result of our capacity to live and work in groups. The very human tendency to draw a line between "us" versus "them" is vital in the process of forming coalitions and allegiances, all for the ultimate purpose of survival. The nature of racism stems from similar evolutionary roots of (1) ingroup favoritism; (2) the tendency to categorize people into ingroup and outgroup; and (3) the role of amygdala as a learned mechanism to warning of danger.

The expressions of racism

Racism has long been the weapon to achieve power since it is connected with the notion of superiority, and this genetic superiority is justified through simplistic visual features such as physical body types, habits, or cultural rituals.

Institutional racism. Earlier in this chapter we made reference to institutional prejudice. Institutional racism operates in a very much similar way. In this section, we will have a closer look at how detrimental the effects of this systematic racism are on specific groups and society as a whole.

The most vivid example of institutional racism in our modern history is slavery, which was largely

based on a racist ideology and allowed slave owners to justify their act on the grounds that slaves were "heathens" (not Christians), and that the color of their skin was evidence of natural inferiority. To keep this status of power and continue to reap rich economic reward, the doctrine *white supremacy* was developed, and a lot of money was invested in *scientific racism* in order to prove that whites are born superior, and thus have the "burden" to educate and master other inferior racial groups.[33]

Another example of how racism was used for economic gain occurred with the Jews. Today, the practice of lending money for interest is the basis of our economy, but before capitalism emerged, usury was seen by many as a sin or inferior work, practiced mostly by Jews who were excluded from many professions and trades and had no job alternatives. This is one of the reasons why Jews excelled in business and finance as merchants and middlemen, but they also suffered from hatred of those who borrowed money. In fact, even this sinful job was given to the Jews out of economic interest of the medieval European economy. From the 11th century, greater commerce and urbanization became possible due to new agricultural surpluses, which made the economic function of lending money more important. However, lending money was condemned. The church solved this dilemma in the early 12th century by allowing Jews to practice this sinful activity since Jews were not subject to canon law. Medieval Kings exploited the new situation, now that they were able to exact heavy taxes from Jewish usurers in exchange for protection[34]. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the medieval economic landscape changed when cross-border trade flourished. Jews became economic rivals of the new merchant class. Together with the rise of capitalism, anti-Semitism was cultivated in order to eliminate economic competitors, turning Jews into scapegoats for popular discontent and blamed for all social problems. Although there is no such race as Jews, they were portrayed as a people of "greedy", "self-interest", "cheating on non-Jews", "secretly dominating the whole economic system", or "cooperating with their communist counterparts to topple Christian civilization."[35] The 18th and 19th century saw the expansion of industrialization with many people driven from the land and forced to work in factories. Anti-Semitism was used to shift the blame from those who actually profited from their suffering. Later in the 20th century, the Nazi's creation of a "master race" condemned Jews as an inferior race, leading to the genocide of six million Jews whose confiscated wealth paid for 30% of the wars Nazi waged.[36] Even today, Jews are identified with the nation of Israel, allowing political grievances to mix with racism, creating a "perfect enemy" to seek unity, to divert criticism out of the country, or to blame Jewish conspiracies for homegrown problems.

Today, economic racism still affects many minority and marginal groups. A recent investigation[37] reports that in Finland and Belgium, unemployment rates are three times higher for people born outside the EU than for the native-born population. African migrants in Spain are twice as likely to be unemployed compared to people from the majority population. In Hungary, wages paid to Roma are lower than the Hungarian minimum wage. In Poland, migrant workers are often forced to work overtime under the threat of dismissal. One particular group – Muslims – tends to suffer a dual blow of both a scarce job market and the head-on clash with the prolonged social anxiety caused by September 11. In the Netherlands, more than half of recruitment agencies complied with clients' request not to introduce Moroccan, Turkish or Surinamese candidates[38], many of whom are Muslim. In South Africa, the past still leaves a legacy of racial hostility that leads to violence[39] and job discrimination against white people.[40] Affirmative Action which emphasizes racial quota systems is believed by many as "reverse

racism,"[41] causing skilled laborers, know-how, and capital to leave the country[42], resulting in lack of economic growth and fewer international companies wanting to invest.

Fig 3. A comic demonstrating institutional racism (Barry Deutsch)

Other forms of economic racism manifest themselves in service and price offers. Minorities such as gays and immigrants have suffered from denial in various service sectors: education, health care, religious support, restaurants, hotels, councils, housing opportunities, and child adoption.

Business owners also suffer from economic racism. Women of color start businesses at rates three to five times faster than all other businesses; however, once in business, their growth lags behind all other firms due to the negative impact of race and gender[43]. In capital investment markets, banks are often accused of not providing loans and other financial instruments for minority owned businesses, abusing the legal system in avoidance of "high risk" while failing to provide reasons to back up their denials[44]. Minority business owners pay interest rates 32 percent higher than what whites pay for loans.[45]

Aversive/symbolic racism. Aversive and symbolic racism indicates a subtle type of discrimination, held by people who may even have positive opinions in pubic contexts, but hidden negative views, either subconsciously (aversive) or consciously (symbolic). It is therefore possible for an aversive racist to strongly and genuinely oppose racism. Even people who outwardly abhor racism can make unfair assessments, exercising stereotypes and prejudices of which they are not even aware.

Symbolic racism stems from a perceived conflict of value, for instance, that the outgroup has a negative impact on the dominant culture, and that they suffer from their failure because of their "lack of effort" rather than external disadvantages[46]. One has symbolic racism/sexism when one believes that the glass ceiling does not exist, minorities/women do not "try hard enough". Since the focus is switched from

visual racial traits such as skin color to an abstract trait of *value*, it is called "symbolic" racism. This is also the most pervasive form of discrimination since it shies away from the direct racial slurs and takes cover in "common sense" as a means of justification, which is more politically correct in liberal democracies[47]. Some say that symbolic racism is the underground form of old-fashioned racism.

Since symbolic racism discriminates in the name of values, it can also be subconscious racism (aversive) because people are not aware that they are making decision under the influence of racism. A modern example of aversive racism can be traced back to the 2008 American presidential election. Research indicated that support for Obama would have been 6% points higher if he were white. In fact, he lost votes from those well-educated whites, who genuinely believe in racial equality, but unconsciously have no intention of voting for a black president. They may have criticized him for
lack of experience, but this would not have been an issue if he were a white[48].

Other similar forms of racism are *modern racism* and *ambivalent racism*. The former sees racism as wrong but view racial minorities as making unfair demand or receiving more than they deserve. The latter is often struggling with an emotional conflict between positive and negative feelings towards a certain group. All forms of subtle racism can lead to disadvantages of stigmatized racial groups where subconscious feelings of racism and prejudice have significant impact in skewing the true picture of ability.

Tokenism. A person is called a "token" when she/he is employed or placed in a certain setting as symbolic representation of the entire minority group. Tokens often feel very *visible* and suffer from *stereotype threat* because they stand out from the rest of the group[49]. In addition, others view them not as unique individuals but in terms of the group they represent: as *the* woman or *the* Bulgarian, which allows stereotypes to easily be formed or connected. Tokens therefore are under great pressure to behave in an expected, stereotypical way. Yet at the same time, they have to perform, any mistakes they make will be more likely to catch attention. This leads to more frequent reprimand and more severe punishment. And because tokens are perceived as representatives of a collective minority group, they are stripped of their individual identities and their failures will be perceived as inherent weaknesses or characteristics of the whole group[50].

GENES VS. CULTURE

It can be quite disheartening to know that stereotypes, prejudices and racism have evolutionary origins and thus it is quite hard to change. However, it is not all bad news from the lab of neuroscientists. Quite the opposite. Modern evolutionary biology is making enormous contributions to our understanding of stereotypes, prejudices, race, and racism. They have reported on how these ideas and attitudes are formed, expressed, and also how they can be potentially controlled.

The human brain is very adaptive

The way we have evolved to live dependently on groups and the way we tend to rely on the amygdala seem to suggest that we are bound to be a little bit racist. Fortunately, neuroscience has proved that

the amygdala alone does not drive all of our behavior:

> Our brains have evolved such that we have a large and highly-complex frontal cortex, which allows us to inhibit impulses, make complicated decisions and behave in socially appropriate ways. This frontal cortex helps most of us tamp down our gut reactions and, in our conscious behaviors, strive to treat members of all races equally. The human mind is extremely adept at self-control and self-regulation.[51]

Although we automatically categorize everyone into two camps of ingroup-outgroup, thanks to this brain capacity, their expression can often be moderated. Self-regulation is critical for the adaptive expression of social behavior, especially in an era of increasing diversity, international relations, global communication and awareness of civil rights issues.[52] Our human mind is aware of this rapid change in a social environment and is able to adapt in a way that ensures appropriate social behaviors. Over the last century, there has been a dramatic drop in racist attitudes. A conscious desire to move beyond our prejudices can erode racism and other forms of bigotry. Therefore, the evolutionary root of stereotypes provides no excuse for prejudicial attitudes and racist reactions. Sure we are vulnerable to them, but we have the ability to act upon them.

Culture is the pool of instruction

In chapter 1, we discussed how the human race is less and less dependent on DNA to get the instruction of how to survive. Instead, we are now at the stage of taking most information and guidance from our social environment. The instincts are there, we acknowledge their impact. But we are also aware that as human beings, we are capable of listening to a good idea instead of hopelessly following the dictate of a gene.

While the social environment is our life advancement resource, it contains both ideas we are supposed to learn and also ideas we are supposed to fight against. We absorb stereotypes and prejudices from our parents, from schools, and especially from mainstream media. At the same time, we are also under the influence of counter-stereotypes and prejudices. Of course these ideas compete with each other, and the strongest wins. Unfortunately, the strongest is not always the best. We have seen dark moments in our history where a powerful idea is also a disastrous idea.

Being aware of this, it is now possible for us to comprehend the importance of a healthy cultural milieu. Societies that constantly reinforce racial and gender prejudices also make it hard for justice and equality. In a world that is so rapidly changing and becoming more integrated, it is crucial to be aware of our tendency to make mistakes, our ability to learn/unlearn, and especially our responsibility to do so.

Stereotype vs. accurate cultural fact

At this point, a critical person would pose a critical question: "How can I distinguish between a stereotype and a fact?" Obviously, saying "The bankers are greedy" is a prejudice, but how about "The bankers naturally are concerned about material wealth as a side effect of their profession"?

There is a world of difference between a stereotype and an accurate cultural description. It is helpful

to remember that stereotypes and prejudice are based on perception and accurate cultural description is based on research. These are four criteria to determine whether some cultural information is valid and not just stereotype or prejudice:[53]

- It is descriptive and not judgmental.
- It is verifiable from more than one independent source.
- It applies, if not to all members of the population, at least to a statistical majority.
- It discriminates; that is, it indicates those characteristics for which this population differs from others.

Now let's consider the following statement: "The Dutch are tall". The first criterion is ticked, because the statement is descriptive and not evaluative, it does not attach a moral connotation, good or bad. The second criterion is missing, but can be supplied by at least two studies confirming that the height of the Dutch is above the world's average. The third criterion is also not met, but can be supplied by statistics confirming that this height applies to the majority of the Dutch, and not *all* the Dutch. The fourth criterion is vague, since "being tall" without a frame of comparison is useless, we don't know if the Dutch are "taller than whom?" Conclusion: the statement in its original form is more of a stereotype than an accurate cultural observation.

If we look at the value and communicative dimensions of Hall, Hofstede and Trompenaars, we begin to see that there are ways to classify or describe individual and collective groups that do not rely on stereotypes and prejudices. Instead, they are based on research. So we say: "This person or this culture is *high* power distance with the index of 90" instead of "this person is acting ridiculously authoritative".

Obviously, it is not always easy to pause and gather all information to determine whether a piece of information is fact or stereotype. However, we know that with some conscious effort, it is possible. After all, stereotypes and prejudices are everywhere and we cannot avoid them. We cannot even escape its immediate impact. However, we have the choice to not act upon them and even better, to regulate our own behavior and modify our natural tendency.

Summary

- Stereotypes have *cognitive* roots in how the human brain has evolved to categorize in order to save thinking time.

  Prejudices stem from *affective* roots in how humans favor their own ingroup, hence develop apathy towards out-group people. Both stereotypes and prejudice can lead to discrimination, which is a *behavior* that can turn inaccurate and negative feeling into unfair and unjust action against certain individuals or groups. Racism is a *belief*.

- Stereotypes, prejudice, and racism have been used as tools to the economic or social advantages of a certain group against others, mostly women and minorities.

- Although rooted in evolution, stereotypes, prejudice and racism are not *hardwired* into the human brain. We are capable of taking life instruction from the social environment (and not from DNA) and to consciously evaluate and control our thoughts and behavior.

- One way to separate a stereotype from accurate cultural fact is to follow the 4 criteria proposed by Hofstede.

Activities and Discussion ideas

1. Discuss the following statements:

    ➢ The very ink with which history is written is merely fluid prejudices (Mark Twain)
    ➢ The less secure a man is, the more likely he is to have extreme prejudice (Clint Eastwood)
    ➢ Yes, I'm blonde. When I started as an actor, because of the accent and my body and my personality, it was not what the stereotype of the Latina woman in Hollywood is, so they didn't know where to put me. The blond hair wasn't matching. The moment I put my hair dark, it was better for my work (Sofia Vergara)

2. Think about yourself and your different identities (with regards to religion, ethnicity, gender, age, life style, profession, etc), and note the stereotypes, prejudices, or discrimination that you have experienced.

3. Think about a time when you saw someone being discriminated against, and you did n*ot* act upon it.

4. Think about a time when you saw someone being discriminated against, and you acted upon it.

5. Find a news article, a TV program, or an advertisement that conveys messages of stereotypes, prejudices or racism. Identify the issues, and propose a different way of presenting it.

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