

# Cross Cultural Understanding

## Chapter 7

### **Ethnocentrism and Othering**

"Barriers to intercultural communication"

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# Learning Objectives



**By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:**

1. Discuss the implications of social categorization and othering for intercultural relations
2. Define and discuss the nature of ethnocentrism
3. Distinguish between a generalization and a stereotype
4. Describe the process of stereotyping and provide examples of stereotypes (e.g. racial and ethnic, language, gender, religious)
5. provide examples of sexist and ageist language
6. Explain how stereotypes can serve as barriers to intercultural communication
7. define and provide examples of bias and prejudice
8. define and provide examples of discrimination and discriminatory language
9. define and discuss the nature of racism and three types of racism
10. describe the potential impact of racism and xenophobia on intercultural relations


"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

**(Lorde 1986: 197, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**

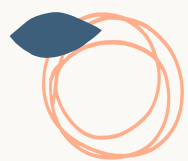
# INTRODUCTION



'{O}'ur preference for things we understand and are familiar with can adversely influence our perception of and attitude toward new and different people and things. This can lead stereotyping, prejudice, racism, and ethnocentrism.




**(Samovar et al., 2012: 169, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**





# **SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION AND OTHERING**





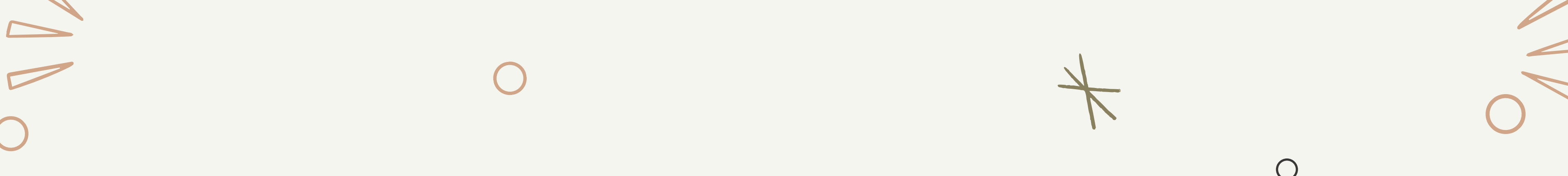
Social categorization refers to the way we group people into conceptual categories in order to make sense of our increasingly complex social environment.

**( Jackson, 2014)**

**Perception**, - ‘becoming aware of, knowing, or identifying by means of the senses’ through a three-step process involving selection, organization and interpretation

**(Jandt 2007: 433, as cited in Jackson, 2014).**





**Essentialism** is the position that the attributes and behavior of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group. As an ideology, essentialism rests on two assumptions:

- (1) groups can be clearly delimited; and
- (2) group members are more or less alike.

**(Bucholtz, 2003: 400, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**



Although such categorizations are useful as sense-making strategies for human behavior, if unchecked, they can lead to more extreme understandings of cultural difference, such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and prejudice—the roots of racism.

**(Prue Holmes, 2012: 468, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**

**Otherization or Othering**, a form of social representation, involves 'the objectification of another person or group'.

**(Abdallah-Preteille, 2003, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**

'...largely ignoring the complexity and diversity of individual characteristics such as thoughts, emotions, actions.'

**(Holliday, 2006, 2012; Dervin, 2012; Virkama, 2010, as cited in Jackson, 2014).**

Individuals tend to categorize people in their social environment into ingroups and outgroups such as ‘us’ and ‘them’.

- Ingroup members
- Outgroup members

**(Wodak, 2008, as cited in Jackson, 2014).**



# ETHNOCENTRICISM

**Ethnocentric** behaviour may be characterized by arrogance, vanity and even contempt for people who do not belong to one's ingroup. Ethnocentric thinking may cause us to make false assumptions and premature judgments about people who have been socialized in a different cultural environment.

**(Jackson, 2014).**





In stark contrast with ethnocentrism, **cultural relativism** refers to the view that beliefs, value systems and social practices are culturally relative, that is, no culture is inherently superior to another. Ethnorelativism means ‘to understand a communication practice from the other person’s cultural frame of reference’

**(Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012: 301, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**



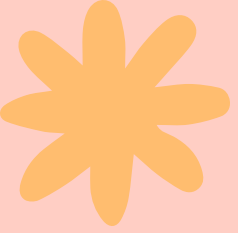


# STEREOTYPING

A stereotype is a preconceived idea that attributes certain characteristics such as personality traits, intelligence, intentions and behaviours to all the members of a particular social class or group of people .

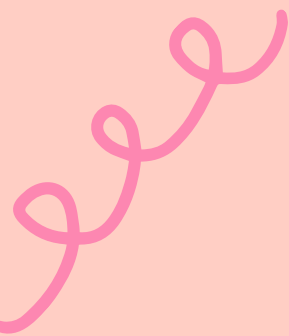
**(Allport 1954; Bar-Tal 1996; Holliday 2010, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**





A **generalization** is ‘a statement about common trends within a group, but with the recognition that further information is needed to ascertain whether the generalization applies to a particular person’.

**(Galanti, 2000: 335, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**



## Reasons why people resort to stereotyping:

1. to quickly process new information about a person or situation,
2. to organize previous experiences,
3. to stress differences between themselves and other individuals or groups (e.g. to convey that 'us' is superior to 'them'),
4. to make predictions about other people's behaviour,
5. to simplify their life and so on.

**(Jackson, 2014)**

The process of stereotyping typically involves the following steps:

- Often individuals are categorized, usually on the basis of easily identifiable characteristics such as sex or ethnicity.
- A set of attributes is ascribed to all (or most) members of that category. Individuals belonging to the stereotyped group are assumed to be similar to each other, and different from other groups, on this set of attributes.
- The set of attributes is ascribed to any individual member of that category.

**(Hewstone & Brown 1986: 29, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**

## Case Study

"From my own experience of the Mainland, I have a bad impression that people there are less civilized than Hong Kong people. They are untrustworthy, unfair, and unjust. Bribery and corruption are all around in court, in schools, in companies, and even in streets . . .

They are less educated in the concepts of hygiene: they squat in toilets, spit around the streets, and throw rubbish all around . . . It is not surprising there are a lot of contagious diseases. The Mainland Chinese are just inferior to us Hong Kong people. Hence, it is a torture for me to visit my relatives in the Mainland."

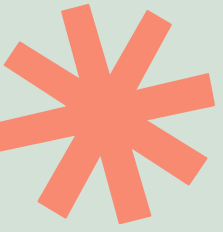
**(Jackson, 2014)**

Stereotyping about groups of people can be based on a wide range of characteristics such as language/accent, ethnicity, physical appearance, nationality, religion, geographic location, class, age, sex, gender, etc.

**(Jackson, 2014)**

Asians are often assumed to excel in mathematics and the learning of musical instruments (e.g. the violin, piano).

**(Jackson, 2014)**



The behaviour, conditions or attitudes that promote stereotypes of social roles based on gender is referred to as **sexism**.

**Gender stereotyping** refers to simplistic overgeneralizations about the gender characteristics, differences and roles of males and females.

**(Jackson, 2014)**

## **Case Study**

When two professors were formally introduced at the conference meeting as Dr Martin Shore and Mrs Nakano, male lecturer was given more respect than female lecturer.

(Jackson, 2014)

**Ageism** ‘works to create and sustain assumptions about aged individuals and their behaviours, attitudes, and values’.

**(Hopkins, 2010: 8, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**



Dervin (2012), Samovar et al. (2010), Sorrells (2012), as cited in Jackson (2014) identified a number of ways in which stereotypes can become engrained and serve as barriers to intercultural communication:

1. Stereotypes can lead us to believe that a commonly-held belief is actually true, when in fact it is not.
2. Stereotypes may compel us to only accept information that is in accord with our previous perceptions of a particular outgroup. Even if we meet an individual who does not fit our preconceived ideas, we may choose to ignore this new information.
3. Stereotypes are difficult to change, in part, because many were formed in childhood through messages from people we love and respect, as well as through portrayals in the media (e.g. TV, movies). Therefore, we may fail to modify the stereotype even when it no longer fits with our actual observations and experience.
4. When we stereotype we assume that all members of a group possess the same characteristics and we fail to recognize or acknowledge individual variations.



5. Stereotypes generally reduce people to a single aspect of their identities (e.g. trait, characteristic or dimension), overlooking the dynamic and multifaceted nature of identities.
6. When we stereotype, we send and interpret messages in ways that do not convey recognition of the unique, individual characteristics of others; instead, we rely on oversimplified, overgeneralized perceptions, which is not fair to the people we are communicating with as it reduces them to mere 'cultural representatives'.
7. Stereotyping can lead to the use of language that diminishes the worth of individuals, perpetuates overgeneralizations, and leads to inequality (e.g. sexist language, ageist discourse).
8. Stereotyping devalues individuals and groups, and can result in or perpetuate inequality (e.g. gender inequality, age inequality, religious inequality and so on), which is very damaging to intercultural relations.



# BIAS

‘[f]or good or for bad, we all have biases. We see things in terms of what we know’

**(Hadley (1993: 368 as cited in Jackson, 2014))**

## Case Study

In 2020, I went to a remote area in Indonesia where the majority of the population have tattoos on their bodies. Honestly this makes me uncomfortable when interacting with them. I feel they are a group of people who are not good in attitude and not wise in taking care of their bodies.



# PREJUDICE

Prejudiced attitudes include irrational feelings of dislike and even hatred for certain groups, biased perceptions and beliefs about the group members that are not based on direct experiences and firsthand knowledge, and a readiness to behave in negative and unjust ways toward members of the group.

**(Lustig and Koester 2010: 156, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**



# PREJUDICE

Individuals may be prejudiced towards people who have a different accent, second-language speakers, individuals with a different sexual orientation/preference, believers of another religion (or individuals who are atheists, non-believers), minority group members, foreigners and people who have a different skin or hair colour, etc.

**(Jackson, 2014)**

# **DISCRIMINATION**

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'Discrimination can be thought of as 'the expression of prejudice'

**(Samovar et al. 2006: 175, as cited in Jackson)**

**or**

'prejudice "in action"'

**(Lustig & Koester 2012: 158, as cited in Jackson, 2014).**

# DISCRIMINATION

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The United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (1989) defines **racial discrimination** as any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin, which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life.

**(As cited in Jackson, 2014)**

# DISCRIMINATION

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A Chinese student who was having difficulty adjusting to England wrote the following in her sojourn diary:

The British don't accept us to be in their country. Discrimination is still there, though there may be laws to protect you . . . Now, I feel more about my Chinese identity. It will never equal to western people. We are too different. We don't understand, or refuse to understand each other fully. They are too far ahead of us. (I notice the use of 'we', 'I' versus 'they' here; there is really a distinction).

**(As cited in Jackson, 2014)**



## **Discriminatory language**

In Australia, the term ‘abos’ is sometimes used for Indigenous Australians, ‘pooftas’ for gay men, ‘queue jumpers’ for refugees or asylum seekers, ‘welfare cheats’ for the unemployed, ‘wogs’ for European immigrants and their children, ‘spazzes’ for people living with cerebral palsy and ‘geriatrics’ for older people.

**(Equal Opportunity Unit 2005; Pauwels 1991 as cited in Jackson, 2014)**



# Discriminatory practices

Discriminatory beliefs and practices are often driven by fear and ignorance, and the craving of power over others.

**(Jackson, 2014)**

the formation of one's cultural identity can sometimes lead to hostility, hate, and discrimination directed against nonmembers of that culture. Strong ingroup affiliations can foster ethnocentric practices, including discrimination and exclusion.

**Lustig and Koester, 2012: 159, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**



# Combating discrimination

Perceptions and attitudes towards differences and disabilities can and do change over time.

**(Jackson, 2014)**

In 2012, Malala Yousafzai, a 15-year-old Pakistani schoolgirl, survived a murder attempt by the Taliban (Islamic fundamentalists) as she fought for the right of girls to attend school in the Swat Valley of Pakistan. In 2013, she became the youngest nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. As she recovers, Malala continues to press for women's rights and education for all children. Inspired by her courage, young people and adults all over the globe are joining her crusade to combat gender discrimination.



## Combating discrimination

In the U.S., **affirmative action** (known as **positive discrimination** in the U.K.), refers to education, business or employment policies that aim to redress the negative, historical impact of discrimination by taking factors such as race, sex, religion, gender or national origin into consideration in hiring/promotion/selection situations. (e.g. **Racial Quotes**)

**(Jackson, 2014)**



# Racism

Race has always been established as relationships of domination, oppression, and privilege that position people differently in society.

**(Parker & Mease 2009: 316, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**

Racism as ‘[t]he belief that one racial group is superior and that other racial groups are necessarily inferior’.

**Liu et al. (2011: 291, as cited in Jackson, 2014)**

## **Types of Racism**

**Individual racism** refers to a person's attitudes, beliefs and actions, which can support or perpetuate racism.

**Institutional racism** can result in differential access to the goods, services and opportunities of society.

**Systemic racism** can lead to the mistreatment of people on a wide scale (e.g. minorities in a particular nation may suffer injustices in all aspects of life due to racist policies).

**(Jackson, 2014)**



## **XENOPHOBIA**

Xenophobia is a severe aversion to or irrational fear (phobia) of ‘foreigners’ or ‘strangers’, that is, basically anyone who is different from oneself or one’s ingroup, especially in terms of culture (ways of being), language and politics.

On a regional or national level, this may lead to discriminatory policies and anti-immigration legislation.

**e.g. mass expulsion, brutal killings  
immigrants or particular ethnic groups,  
such as the atrocities that have taken place  
in Bosnia, Nazi Germany and Darfur**

**(Jackson, 2014)**

## **OVERCOMING ETHNOCENTRICISM AND IDENTITY BIASES**

To be a competent intercultural communicator, it is vital to acknowledge the impact of the socialization process on our identities and actions (verbal, nonverbal), as well as how we view the behaviours of people who are different from ourselves. **(Jackson, 2014)**

To be mindful intercultural communicators, we must recognize the harmful effects of ethnocentrism and stereotyping, and take steps to ‘recognize, accept, and celebrate’ cultural difference. **(Lorde 1986: 197 as cited in Jackson, 2014)**

To enhance intercultural interactions, we need to recognize the dimensions of our identities that are meaningful to us such as ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality. **(Jackson, 2014)**

Do you respect the identities of others? Are you attentive to messages that individuals from other linguistic or cultural backgrounds send about their preferred identities? Do you avoid the use of sexist or ageist language? If an intercultural encounter does not go well, do you automatically assume that someone from another culture is discriminating against you? Do you quickly label the individual as a racist or do you take time to reflect on other possible explanations for the miscommunication? After unsatisfactory intercultural interactions do you reevaluate your own actions and responses or do you tend to always blame the negative outcome on your communication partners?

**(Jackson, 2014)**



Being mindful of the language you use (e.g. avoid the use of terms and jokes that belittle people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds).

Knowing how you see yourself and wish to be positioned in various contexts (e.g. at home, in a foreign land) are key elements in intercultural communication.


Heightening self-awareness can help you to become a more successful communicator. It can enable you to be more sensitive to the preferred self-identities of people you interact with and more accepting of different ways of being.

**(Jackson, 2014)**



Opening our eyes to see cultural differences is one thing. Opening our heart to accept and respect the differences is another thing. To be open-minded and competent in intercultural contacts, we have to set aside our cultural biases, perceptions about beliefs, values and norms and our expectations on others. This process often involves a lot of internal struggles and anxieties. A way to cope with these internal struggles is to lighten up a bit and be able to laugh about ourselves. The key to deal with cross-cultural communication is to have a sense of humor.

**(Jackson, 2014)**



When interacting with people from a different culture, we may need to adjust our behaviors. I'm still learning to put myself into others' shoes and interpret others' behaviors from their cultural perspectives instead of mine. When I come across people of other cultures violating the rules of our culture, I step back and see the causes of problems in communication before I make negative comments on others. How can we judge anyway if the standard is not the same?

**(Jackson, 2014)**

**‘Change your thoughts and you change your world’  
(Peale, 2007: 233, as cited in Jackson, 2014).**

# Discussion Question

- How might our perceptions of our cultural identity influence our communication with people who have a different linguistic and cultural background?
- What factors influence one's attitudes towards people who speak a different language or have a different accent?
- Define ethnocentrism and explain how it can lead to stereotyping and prejudice.
- In a small group, discuss the causes of prejudice. Cite examples from your personal experience and discuss ways to combat prejudiced behaviour.
- Why are immigrants and minority groups often the targets of prejudice and discrimination? What is the impact of this and how might it be combated?
- In this chapter we examined numerous ways to combat ethnocentric tendencies and biases. What other suggestions do you have to foster a more ethnorelative perspective in intercultural interactions? Share your views in small groups.

# Reference

Jackson, J. (2014). *Introducing language and intercultural communication*. Routledge.