Barriers to Intercultural Communication

Cultural biases, social categorization

Social categorization

- Refers to the way we group people into conceptual categories in order to make sense of our complex social environment.

- Includes knowing or identifying through three-steps process: selection, organization and interpretation (the act of *perception);*

- We make conclusions about individual behavior based on group patterns;

Essentialism – the position that the attributes and behavior of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural or/and biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group.

2 assumptions of essentialism: 1) groups can be clearly delimited; 2) group members are more or less alike.

Othering

- **Social categorization** and **Othering** are linked to **social identity theory** developed to explain intergroup behavior – individuals tend to categorize people in their social environment into ingroups and outgroups.

- *Ingroup* – people with whom you feel connected (family members, close friends)

- *Outgroup* – those with whom we feel emotionally and psychologically detached.

Ethnocentrism

- Term refers to the notion that the beliefs, values, norms and practices of one's culture are superior to those of others.

- People generally perceive their own experiences , which are shaped by their own cultural forces, as natural, human and universal.

- It is a learned belief.

- Individuals with an ethnocentric mindset see people from other cultural background as inferior or insignificant compared with their own ingroup members.

- Ethnocentric behavior may be characterized by arrogance, vanity and even contempt to people who do not belong to one's ingroup.

Ethnocentrism

- According contemporary conceptualization ethnocentrism should be viewed along a continuum- everyone, to some extent, is ethnocentric.

High ethnocentrism

Low ethnocentrism

Patriotism   Loyalty   Nationalism   Ethnic cleansing
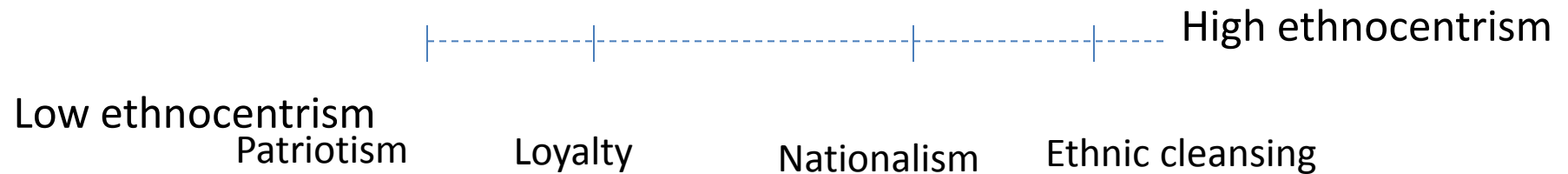
Stereotyping

- Refers to a strong tendency to characterize people from other cultural backgrounds unfairly, collectively and usually negatively.

- **A stereotype** – a preconceived idea that attributes certain characteristics (e.g. personality traits, intelligence, intentions and behaviors to all the members of a particular social class or group of people.

Stereotyping

- We are not born with stereotypes, we learn them during the process of socialization;

- When we mature we are influenced by presenting different groups by the media as well as our own life experiences;

- Stereotypes may also emerge out of fear, ignorance or distrust of people who are different from ourselves.

Stereotyping

Steps of stereotyping process:

1. Often individuals are categorized usually on the basis of easily identifiable characteristics such as sex or ethnicity.

2. A set of attributes is ascribed to all (or most) members of that category.

3. The set of attributes is ascribed to any individual member of that category.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping can be based on a wide range of characteristics:

- Cities (Romans, Parisians, Berliners)
- Regions within countries
- Race (Caucasians, Hispanics, African Americans)
- Religion (Christians, Buddhists, Atheists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus)
- Ethnic groups (Arabs, Hispanics, Chinese, black Africans)
- National groups (Italians, Lithuanians, Americans)
- Age (youngsters, adolescents, teenagers, middle-aged, senior people)
- Vocations (doctors, teachers, clergy, football players)
- Physical attributes (obese, anorexic, tall, dwarfs)
- Social class (poor, white collar, blue collar, upper middle class, the rich, etc.)
- Disabilities (deafness, blindness, mentally disabled)
- Gender (masculinity, femininity)

Stereotyping - Sexism

- **Sexism** – behavior, conditions or attitudes that promote stereotypes of social roles based on gender;

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

- Gender stereotypes are typically expressed through **sexist language** – the use of words or phrases that unnecessarily emphasize gender, or ignore, belittle or stereotype members of either sex.

Erasmus+

O Opening

U Universities for

V Virtual

M Mobility

Stereotyping

- **Ageism –** refers to stereotyping or discrimination of a person or group of people due to their age.

- **Ageism stereotyping** involves categorizing individuals into groups according to their age and then ascribing certain characteristics and behaviors to all people of that age group.

Bias and prejudice

- **Bias**- a personal preference, like or dislike, which can interfere with our ability to be objective, impartial and without prejudice.

- **Prejudice** refers : to "dislike or hatred of a person or group formed without reason. It is culturally conditioned since it is rooted in a person's early socialization" (Maude, 2011:112, in J.Jackson, 2014); - to negative attitudes towards other people that are based on faulty and inflexible stereotypes.

Bias and prejudice

- Gordon Allport – first to focus on prejudice, argued that prejudiced people ignore evidence that is inconsistent with their biased viewpoint, or they distort the evidence to fit their prejudices.

- Roots of prejudice – *ignorance and fear.*

- Prejudiced thinking is dependent on stereotypes as is fairly normal phenomenon.

- Prejudice is universally psychological process.

Prejudice: functions

- Prejudice is common all over the world as it serves many *economic, psychological* and *social functions.*

There may be a variety of reasons for prejudicial thoughts:

- To "fit in" and feel more secure – *utilitarian or adjustment function;*
- *Knowledge function* – people need to have world neatly organized and boxed into categories;
- To boost self-image and self-esteem – *ego-defensive function;*
- To justify a group's domination over another – *value expressive function;*
- To strengthen in-group bonds and gain social distance from outgroups;
- To provide a scapegoat for difficulties in times of trouble.

Discrimination

- "prejudice in action" (Lustig&Koester, 2012:158);
- Many forms and issues that may be encompassed by discrimination. It may occur in all domains of life (work, education, transportation, hospital, etc.);
- Discrimination may be based on: *language, age, accent, sex, pregnancy, race/color of skin religion, national origin, medical condition, mental physical ability*, etc.

Racism
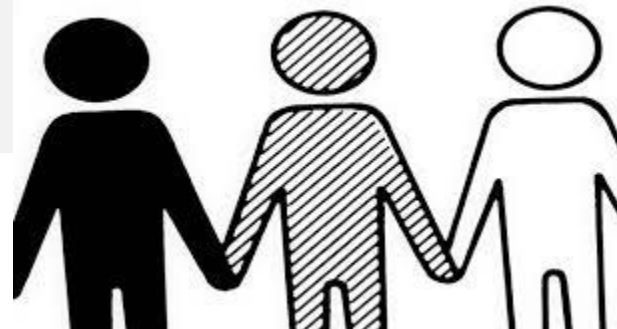
- Race is a social construction that historically has privileged people in positions of power.

- Racism is based on the notion that superiority is biologically determined.

Types of racism

- **Individual racism** – refers to person's attitudes, beliefs and actions, which can support or perpetuate racism (racial jokes, slurs);

- **Institutional racism** – can result in different access to the goods, services and opportunities of society (school, hospital, business);

- **Systematic racism** – can lead to the mistreatment of people on a wide scale (e.g. minorities may suffer injustices in all aspects of life due to racist policies; genocide).

- At **cultural level** racism denies the existence of the culture of a particular group.

Racism

- *Racism* is often used synonymously with *prejudice* and *discrimination*. However, **oppressio**n and **powe**r are those social attributes that distinguish it from these terms.

- **Oppression** refers to the systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of one group of people by other. Racism is the tendency by groups in control of institutional and cultural power to use it to keep members of groups who do not have access to the same kinds of power at a disadvantage.

Xenophobia

- A severe aversion to or irrational fear (phobia) of foreigners or strangers – anyone who is different in terms of culture, language, politics.

- It is broader than racism and encompasses any kind of fear related to an individual or group perceived as being different.

References

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