WHEN STEREOTYPES LEAD TO PREJUDICE: A PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL GUIDE

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Walking through commonplaces and stereotypes

Did you know that "time is money" and "knowledge is power"? You may have also repeated these common truths, as they are said since the beginning of time. Besides, they are plain as day; nobody needs to explain what they mean when they repeat them. However, let's take a breath of fresh air and look closer to the significance of using clichés and commonplaces in our everyday communication and how this is linked to nurturing stereotyping, an uncritical way of stereotypical thinking.

First of all, we will use in the same category clichés, idioms, commonplaces and the such, as they share some common features that are of interest here: they are linguistic expressions familiar to the people who use them and, at the same time, if we look closer to them, their meaning is not always linked with the words said. Nice examples from Orin Hargraves' book, *It's been said before: A guide for the use and abuse of clichés* (2014, p. 8) are the noncompositional propositions, "such as *elephant in the room; lock, stock, and barrel;* and *on the same page*. Other clichés, however, do not meet this criterion, such as *quick to point out; in any way, shape, or form;* and *a whole new level*". Nevertheless, in every case a proposition might make sense, but the clear meaning demands another level of cultural complexity understanding.

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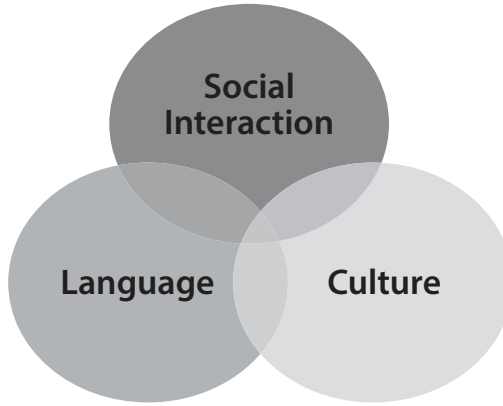


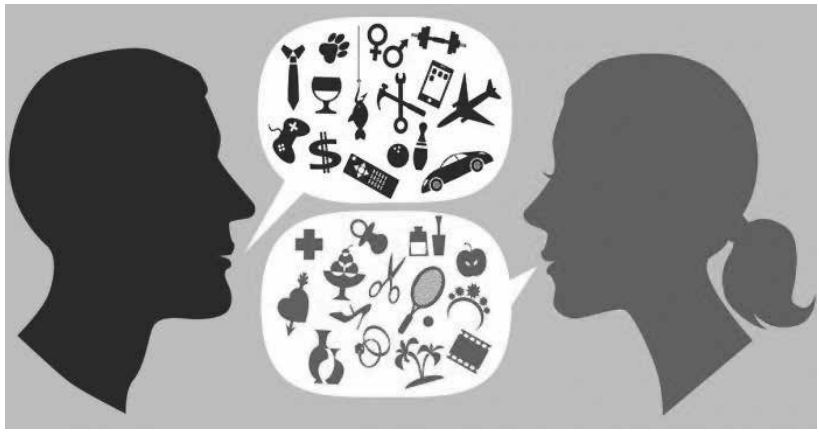
So, commonplaces have a long history that begins with logic, passes by rhetoric, goes through philosophy and ends up between theory and practice. Commonplaces from the beginning signified groups of arguments appropriate to a given subject, the common beliefs or popular opinions that are considered to be true. Commonplaces thus could be seen as a "tool" for our discussions.

However we understand commonplaces, they are an indispensable communication trait, one we all use in our cultural context. As John Dewey (1915/2001, pp. 8-9) notes: "The communication which ensures participation in a common understanding is one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions – like ways of responding to expectations and requirements"; or, as Habermas (1984, p. 58) writes later on: "[F]or members of the same culture the limits of their language are the limits of the world. They can broaden the horizon of their form of life in an ad hoc manner, but they cannot step out of it; to this extent, every interpretation is also a process of assimilation".

A special case of commonplaces, seen in this broad sense, are the stereotypes. A stereotype is first and foremost a generalisation, a simplification. With stereotypes one can express ideas, and opinions, and, deliberately or inadvertently, attribute to individuals or groups specific evaluative characteristics and characterisations. Stereotypes are general claims about social kinds, as in "women have babies" as much as in "Muslims are terrorists" (Beeghly, 2015, pp. 676-678). However, stereotypes are a complex communication form and they

are not always expressed in structured sentences and clearly stated propositions. Like commonplaces, stereotypes are in the foundation of the way we think (Colston, 2015, pp. 103-125); they can arise from our assertions, statements, speech acts, and formed attitudes that imply certain stereotypical beliefs.

Primarily, stereotypes enable us to categorize our experiences, interpretations, and beliefs. Stereotypes sometimes help us understand the world; other times, create incorrect impressions, perceptions, and opinions. We usually believe that our stereotypical ideas are accurate, but in reality they are just clusters, generalizations, and simplifications (Hargrave, 2014). However, our stereotypical opinions are so familiar to us, and we constantly repeat them that we no longer think about their meaning.



Source: https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/gender-stereotypes-are-daily-action-and-are-very-normalized

Stereotypical categorizations are transmitted by the social environment and influence social judgments, even when we try to avoid using them. With stereotypes, we categorize the world so that we can effortlessly move in everyday life. Our goal, therefore, is not to fight or eliminate stereotypes – which would be impossible. Our goal is to learn how to detect and be able to reconstruct them so that they do not uncritically influence our views and opinions. Our primary goal is to judge what we consider definite and standard.

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From stereotypes to prejudice

Stereotypes as claims for social kinds have an evaluative content; thus, they can have a "positive" or "negative" significance. The characterisation of the stereotype as positive or negative sometimes is clear and sometimes it is not. It mostly depends on the cultural understanding of the people communicating. The example of the stereotype that was mentioned above, "women have babies", has not a clear sign; it can have a positive or a negative connotation depending on the context. On the contrary, the other stereotype mentioned, "Muslims are terrorists", has undoubtedly a negative meaning.

The distance we have to cover from negative stereotypes to prejudices is not a long one. Stereotypes soften potential differences with members of the same group; but, they sharpen differences with members of other groups, despite any similarities (e.g., if I belong to the women group, the negative stereotype "men are lazy" unites me with the other women, despite the differences I may have with them - nationality, religion, sexual preferences, etc.).

A prejudice not only separates a social kind (e.g. men/women, young/old, immigrants/natives, etc.), not just attributes negative characteristics to it (e.g. politicians can't be trusted); a prejudice isolates a social group and it targets it (e.g., "immigrants go back to your countries", "women should not drive"). A prejudice, in other words, surpasses the possibly unfair labelling of stereotyping, and

adds a specific biased attitude, especially action-oriented attitudes – biased attitudes that probably qualify actions.

When the stereotypical classification or the characteristics attributed to the stereotyped group are derogatory and/or dismissive, then it is possible to form rigid beliefs and opinions. In this sense, stereotypes are the basis of prejudices, and as Dovidio et al. (2010, p. 5) notes: "Prejudice is typically conceptualized as an attitude that, like other attitudes, has a cognitive component (e.g., beliefs about a target group), an affective component (e.g., dislike), and a conative component (e.g., a behavioural predisposition to behave negatively toward the target group)".

Prejudice, thus, arises when we add beliefs, actions, or reactions to stereotypes (Hinton, 2017); based on these beliefs, we often make decisions and organize our everyday lives. For example, if I have the stereotypical belief that "immigrants are thieves" then when I see an immigrant on the street, I may instinctively hold my bag tighter and feel that I am in danger. Prejudices are the opinions, beliefs, perceptions and impressions that we form when we rely on stereotypes, commonplaces and discriminations without thinking about their arbitrary content and when we make decisions and act in our daily lives based on these beliefs (Blum, 2009).

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To talk about and understand the range of prejudice, one should begin to overview the extent to which it permeates all communications and social relations. As stereotypes categorize the social world and shape our biases, prejudice follows easily and can be applied to any of our stereotypical classifications. In prejudice, our evaluations are built on terms of superior and inferior, better and worse, and give rise to favorable or unfavorable emotions towards specific stereotypical clusters. Rigid prejudice generates racism, lack of tolerance, and hate speech. For example, we hardly feel surprised when we encounter gender and racial prejudice in the field of sports, racist and xenophobic attitudes.

How to address stereotypes and overcome prejudice: a practical guide

As we have already seen, stereotypes and stereotyping are the foundation upon which a large part of our beliefs, actions and reactions are built; they are the medium for our understanding of the world, and we cannot live without them. Participation in our communities and integration into the wider society inevitably depend on the formation of stereotypes and commonplaces. Stereotypes and commonplaces are the cognitive media to understand the world; they come with the necessary categorization, simplification, and systematization of experiences, information, and our social environment.

At the same time, stereotyping is also the foundation of prejudice. For that reason, the first thing (but not the only one) that we can do to address our stereotypical way of thinking is to begin to understand our stereotypes; not to understand what a stereotype is in general, but to try to reveal to ourselves our own generalisations and simplifications. In other words, we have to be on alarm for attitudes, ideas, beliefs that begin with words such as “all of”, “every”, and the like; words that signify the possibility of a generalisation.

It is not at all easy to understand and accept our stereotypes as such, let alone to rearrange the way we think. The first exercise that could apply here is trying to fill sentences that begin with the

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characteristics we identify with, and then critically examine how we filled the sentence. For example, if I feel that I belong to the group "woman" or let's say to the group "writer", how would I complete sentences that begin like: "I am a woman so I must..."; or, "I am a writer so I must...". The qualities that we choose to fill these sentences form our stereotypical way of thinking. It will be equally if not more enlightening to do the same with groups that we feel far away from our identity, or even with groups that generate negative feelings to us.

After this attempt, the next practical and rather amusing step we could take to break our stereotypes and prejudices is to mix up the first and last part of our sentences either for different groups that we identify with or for their opposites. For example, if I have noted a stereotypical belief like "I am blonde so I must... be stupid" and another one like "I am a vegetarian so I must... only eat vegetables", and a third one, let's say: "I wear glasses so I must... be a geek". Now if we mix these sentences, not only we can create new stereotypes, but also break our stereotypical ideas by understanding that many different things could be equally legitimate, and probably equally absurd.

Once we understand somewhat better the stereotypical circle through which we understand the world, the next step would be trying to trigger an original way of thinking. An exercise we could choose to take in this direction would be to create new commonplaces – sentences, sayings, and ideas – that only we can understand. By creating our own commonplaces and stereotypes, not only do we create an original space of personal expression but also engage our critical thinking and our creativity.

These exercises can be done individually or in groups and they can be adapted in any age category. First of all, they aim at understanding how stereotypes are structured and function. Also, they aim at improving self-awareness and at discovering our own stereotypes. Finally, by the activation of critical thinking and intellectual creativity we try to create new ways of approaching our social environments, maybe with a little bit of humor, if we're lucky.

How to address stereotypes and overcome prejudice: the theoretical framework

As we saw above, stereotypes and commonplaces are transmitted through our cultural environments and they are of great importance both in understanding our social environment, as in communicating and acting/reacting easily and within a reasonable time frame. Stereotypes and commonplaces have an empirical and experiential nature, and they are not part of "hard science", they are not a subject matter in school curricula, for example. As we enter the world of stereotypes oblivious of what is happening, it is in a similar way that we can learn to understand them.

Explanatory teaching style, the modern pedagogical myth according to Rancière (1991), limits student autonomy, critical thinking, and active participation. It cedes control to the teacher and turns students into passive recipients, nurturing already the idea of understanding our social world in terms of inferiors and superiors. This is a good demonstration of how discrimination context can be transmitted indirectly, even unintentionally.

Source: https://www.montana.edu/extension/4h/projects/experiential_learning.html

In contrast, experiential learning (e.g., Kolb, 1984; Dewey, 2001 [1915], Piaget, 1950) places the student's interest at the center of the educational process and encourages the student to learn through active participation, through practice, through exercises, and also through experimentation. In experiential learning, learners are at the center of the learning process; they define or co-organize the learning process according to their learning needs, their concerns, their difficulties, etc. The emphasis is now on active participation and reflection, on experience. The educational aim is that the learner theorizes and shapes or modifies knowledge and beliefs they already have.

In the broader context, inclusive pedagogy advocates that no one should be excluded from the educational process, from the school context/the learning and educational environment. With its origins in the field of special education, inclusive education emphasizes everyone's right to education, as well as the equal participation of all students in the educational process, regardless of any barriers they may face, including gender, origin, language, and physical or social limitations. Inclusive pedagogy strongly supports providing support

Source: https://mi.mcmaster.ca/5-principles/

to learners who need it with the main aim of equal participation. Inclusive pedagogy persists on a student-centered approach, it raises issues of diversity in an effort to involve all students and develops practices that promote equality, equity and participation. Inclusive pedagogy is an important tool for social inclusion (e.g., Freire, 2015).

The case of sports

Over the past few years, teaching physical education and sports activities has been developing at a fast pace. Their dynamic presence and potential contribution to the field of social inclusion and the development of social capital are emerging (Council of Europe, 2018). In addition to the physical benefits of exercise, significant social benefits have now been recorded and highlighted. For example, social skills such as leadership skills, participation in decision-making, the development of social behaviour, etc. Another field of particular interest in recent studies is the participants' emotional and cognitive development in physical activities and sports, such as concentration, training, goal setting, and teamwork.

Source: https://dorringtonacademy.co.uk/our-school/health-wellbeing/school-games/

Sports bring learners into profound contact with each other. Thus, sports have become an important tool for creating communities of learners (Casey and Quennerstedt, 2020). Physical education can contribute to personal development and participation in groups and communities based on values such as fair and equal treatment or respect. Also, through physical education and sports, there is an opportunity to directly address problems such as violence, extremism, racist behaviours, etc. Physical education is an appropriate space for cultivating ideas and values such as tolerance, friendship, efficiency, rights, participation, etc.

Physical education and Cooperative learning

- Development of social capital
- Leadership
- Participation
- Decision making
- Social interaction
- Respect.

It is important to emphasize that sports are generally characterized by hierarchy and the formation of specific identity

qualities or distinctive characteristics, which constitute the basis for fan identity and rivalry. In other words, there is intense stereotyping related to sports, with gender discrimination and inequalities being widespread as we often encounter stereotypical ideas about coaches and/or athletes, even about sports. These sports stereotypes link to broader stereotypical social perceptions and prejudices.

In sports, we often come across gender and racial prejudices. The field of sports is overwhelmed by prejudice, discrimination and violence. Hooliganism and violent behaviour in stadiums are the rule, not the exception, and often end up identifying sports with racist and xenophobic attitudes, corruption, unfair practices, etc. Unfortunately, many factors in this field favour discrimination or gender inequalities, sexism, and hate speech. However, these well-known problems should not overshadow sports' multiple virtues. Here, we want to emphasize the possibility of creating communities in which the values of fair and equal treatment of all, participation, intercultural ties, and tolerance will be cultivated (Van der Kreeft, 2017).

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